

IN THESE TIMES

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DECEMBER 12-18, 1984

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BANKS ON THE RUN

PAGE 3

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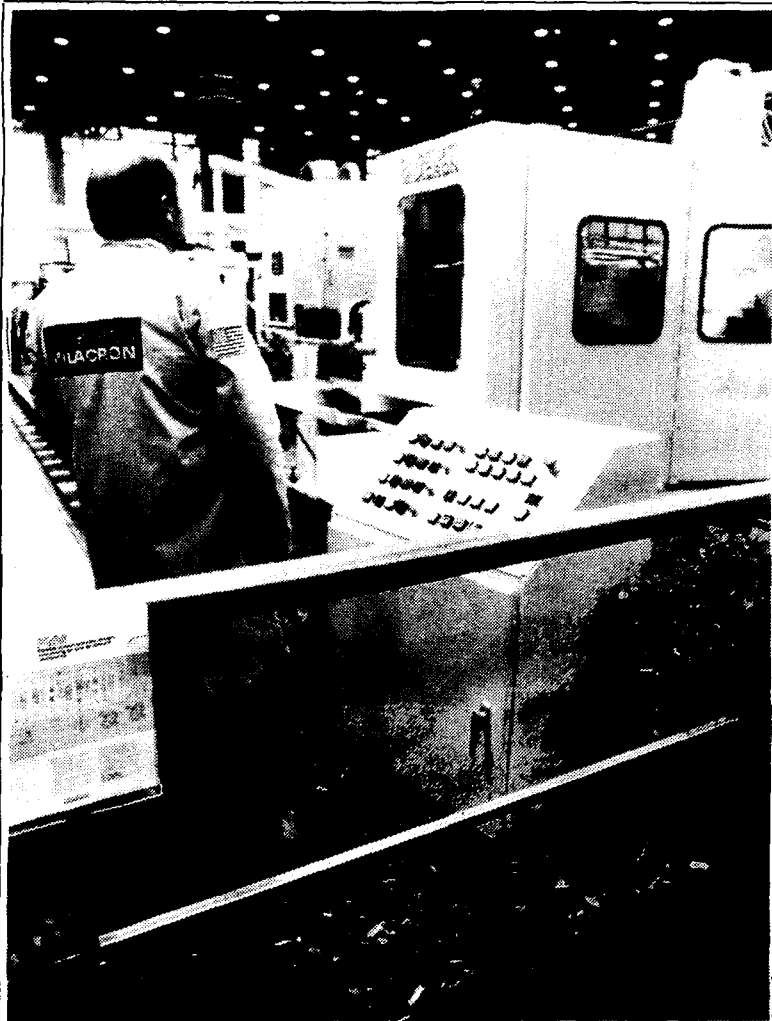
STREETS

**Basketball star's murder
spotlights cycle of
urban violence.**

PAGE 8

BENJAMIN WILSON (1967-1984)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Machine-making machines might replace 15 people per shift.

Machine tool crisis

By David Moberg

CHICAGO

In the grand scheme of money-making, machine tools don't count for much. During a good year sales total around \$5 billion from U.S. companies. "That just about equals the pornography business in a year," mused Harry Hall, a division president of Giddings and Lewis, an industry giant.

Worse yet, it's been a while since there was a good year. From its recent peak in 1981, when the total U.S. market was \$5.4 billion, shipments dropped by more than half to \$2.6 billion last year, and are estimated barely to surpass that for 1984. There has been little recovery for machine tool manufacture, which is concentrated in the Great Lakes states such as Ohio, Michigan and Illinois, and in New England. But there is a semi-bright spot: future orders are up significantly, just as a new recession looms ahead.

But sluggish demand is only part of the problem as the industry

THE STORY INSIDE

undergoes major turmoil. In 1981 imports took about 25 percent of the U.S. market. Last year it was 32.5 percent. This year the import share will probably reach 41.5 percent. Nearly half of those imports come from Japan (with West Germany, Taiwan and the United Kingdom well behind). Gobbled up in mergers and hit hard by competition and recession, machine tool companies have been disappearing rapidly, dropping from 725 in 1977 to less than 500 at the end of 1983. "Where the U.S. machine tool industry was fragmented, family-owned facilities [in the past], that's changed dramatically now," Hall said. "It's going to end up with six, eight or 10 major suppliers." Mergers and conglomerate acquisitions have created a new class of giants and in the process have also destroyed some once-strong companies. But the heaviest toll predictably has been paid by workers in the moderately well-paid, but only one-third unionized industry. Employment plummeted from a 1981 peak of 110,000 to a low of 63,000 and has risen this year by only a few thousand.

This sad tale has importance far beyond the numbers. Even if it is a tiny industry, machine tool manufacture occupies a critical niche in the nation's economy. It is the industry that makes sophisticated lathes, grinders, boring machines and other equipment that cut and shape metal. Those pieces of equipment are crucial for making parts of products like jet engines and earthmoving equipment—tools that in turn mass produce other goods and even more machine tools themselves. They are as necessary for the well-being of supposedly high-technology industries, like computers, as they are for older industries, like automobiles.

"Machine tools are not just any industry," says Harley Shaiken, a researcher at MIT who specializes in technology and labor issues. "They're the very basis of an industrial economy. If you have a weakness there, it has an extraordinary multiplier effect. Even though the Japanese in particular are now building factories in the

U.S. to produce machine tools, Shaiken argues that if domestic toolmakers continue to suffer, U.S. industry will lose the benefits of the close consulting relationship and development of new technologies that make a critical difference in competitiveness. Any discussion of an "industrial policy" for the U.S. must include—if not start with—the tools of the trade.

The economic crisis of the tool business is in part a variation on a theme of decline in other basic industries, but it also is tied up with a technical question: what kinds of tools should the industry be making? At the biennial tool exhibition in Chicago this fall, the stars of the show were Flexible Manufacturing Systems (FMS). Touted as the step toward the fully automated factory of the future, the FMS units or cells exhibited by the industry giants had chunks of metal on robotized pallets, moving from one milling station to another, each station including a computerized tool changer that could include hundreds of different tools. With nary a human hand involved, the complicated part could move through the stages to completion.

"People cannot work as efficiently as machines," Dan Daniels, a consultant to the Machine Tool Builders Association, argued as he showed me around. "They go to coffee breaks, the bathroom. They don't have the dedication a machine has." One cell we looked at might replace 15 people per shift and, he claimed, produce more. Management will "push the button and go home, and it will run all night," he said. "It runs at maximum speed. People won't. They'll step it down so their job will last longer."

So far there are few customers for these cells, since they may cost a few million dollars each, still have bugs and may not be as efficient as manufacturers claim. But the big toolmakers like selling these units, and they flourish in their close relationship with large corporate clients, from Caterpillar to Boeing. The Air Force has strongly promoted more automated manufacturing, and military work—estimated to account for roughly one-fifth of the industry sales—offers the luxury of cost-plus contracting.

Shaiken and other critics think the toolmakers' orientation to the big-ticket, high-profit jobs has left them vulnerable to attack by the Japanese. "They got fat and lazy dealing with the big companies that were in a non-competitive market," argues Jim Regnitz, sales representative for Mazak, a major Japanese firm. In the early '70s, Japanese companies began selling simple machine tools in the U.S., often below cost, according to many observers. Typically the tool industry fluctuates between feast and famine. When there was a boom, smaller companies turned to Japanese suppliers, because American companies could not serve them. Much as they did with electronics and autos, the Japanese captured increasing shares of lower-priced, simpler products. Today two-thirds of horizontal numerically-controlled lathes and three-fourths of machining centers—two of the most common machine tools used in manufacturing—come from overseas. And now, as in other products, the Japanese are moving upward, competing successfully for more of the sophisticated, high-priced tools.

Everybody agrees that wages in the Japanese and U.S. machine tool industries are relatively comparable, but the Japanese have cut costs through superior design and manufacturing procedures. Japanese firms are also more likely to use their own most advanced equipment, such as the nearly automated Mazak factory—sort of a self-reproducing collection of machines. However, historian David Noble, author of the recent *Forces of Production*, questions whether the most advanced computer-controlled manufacturing is really more cost-efficient. Japanese firms have increasingly stressed quality and service, traditional strong points of American companies that often were sacrificed in recent years to meet price competition. In many cases, the machine tool builders were victims of their new owners, who did not understand that toolmakers must respond to bad times not by layoffs but by using engineers and craftspeople to design new products and revamp their own factories. "If anything killed the machine tool industry, it was not the Japanese," argued Michael J. Wicker, vice-president and general manager of Toyota in the U.S. "It was conglomerates stripping cash" in good times and "when bad times came, they [conglomerate managers] said, 'You should stand on your own.' So they'd lay off engineers."

Despite some dissents, the National Machine Tool Builders Association earlier this year filed a petition for a limit of imports to 17.5 percent of the market for five years, citing national security as the rationale. Ironically, "national security" was invoked in the restricting trade with the Soviet Union (by Reagan and by Cold War Democrats before him), drastically reducing U.S. exports to a major market. The overvalued dollar has also crippled U.S. machine tool exports, and more U.S. companies are manufacturing overseas.

There are many reasons to preserve a U.S. machine tool industry, most more inspiring than maintaining U.S. readiness to wage war. But who will own it? What will it do to modernize itself? Will import protection compensate for the ravages of boom-and-bust business cycles and the decline of industries—auto, steel fabricating, oil drilling, farm equipment, construction equipment, for example—that use many of the industry's products? Wouldn't rebuilding industry and stabilizing agriculture in the U.S., not to mention reconstruction of cities, railroads and mass transit, do more—and without the price paid by relying on the arms race as a stimulus?

More fundamentally, as Noble argues in his book, if we are to save the machine tool industry, isn't it time to assess the technology it will produce and its consequences? At a minimum, workers should have a voice in designing the tools. Noble argues that much of the thrust to automation is not justified by cost or quality and carries a tremendous cost in unemployment, the elimination of skills and the erosion of a basis for democracy. Indeed, he argues, much of the drive to automate is simply an extension of management desire to attain control and eliminate pesky workers. If the public saves the machine tool industry, as it should, it should also make sure that the industry serves the needs of the public, not its traditional corporate and military managers.



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Banking deregulation is key issue in economic debate

By John B. Judis

WASHINGTON

THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION's economic policies are reviving an old debate that the Great Depression of the '30s seemed to close. On one side are the proponents of the free market, who argue that by removing government economic regulations the administration will make possible a sharp upsurge in economic growth that will benefit worker and employer alike.

On the other side are the descendants of Marx and Keynes who argue that by unleashing the free market, the Reagan administration will widen the gap between rich and poor and precipitate sharp downturns as well as upturns in the economy, culminating perhaps in another great depression.

Nowhere is the debate more clearly joined than in the question of the deregulation of banking. The anarchy of the banking system was blamed, in part, for the Depression. And one of the first New Deal measures—the Glass-Steagall Act of 1933—was designed to structure and regulate banking. But bankers like Chase Manhattan's David Rockefeller and Citicorp's Walter Wriston, with the firm support of the Reagan Treasury Department, have contended that whatever currently ails the banking industry is the result of excessive regulation.

Deregulation of banking, they argue, will not only spur the economy but it will also benefit the average consumer. Consumers, Comptroller of the Currency C.T. Conover argues, "will benefit from increased competition—which translates into lower prices, better delivery systems and more innovative combinations of products of services."

As the administration begins its second term, it is being strongly urged to continue the process of deregulation. The conservative Heritage Foundation's influential report, *Mandate for Leadership II*—now being circulated among Reagan administration and is scheduled for public release December 7—calls on the administration to "eliminate many of the entry restrictions applied to financial institutions" and "artificial distinctions along product lines."

But North Dakota Rep. Byron Dorgan and other House Democrats have cautioned against the effects of deregulation. He warned last April: "The process of bank deregulation so far has increased the risks of bank failure, undermined the stability of the banking system and increased the concentration of banking resources."

New Deal reforms.

The New Deal reforms limited banks' sphere of activity and tempered competition among them. Banks were prevented from selling or underwriting stocks—a source of massive scandals in the '20s. In exchange, bank interest to depositors was limited to 5.25 percent, deposits up to \$2,500 were protected by the newly established Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) and bank entry was limited to protect existing area banks.

The FDIC was originally designed to protect small depositors as well as their banks, but over 50 years its reach has been expanded to all deposits under \$100,000. With the FDIC's \$4.5 billion intervention last summer in Chicago's Continental Bank crisis, the FDIC role became that of protecting all depositors in banks whose collapse might threaten the entire system.

Deregulation began during the last years of the Carter administration and was carried through by the Reagan Treas-

ury and Utah Republican Sen. Jake Garn's Senate Banking Committee. In 1980 and 1982, Congress passed legislation that removed the upper limit on bank interest and set up checking accounts with interest (NOW accounts). The Reagan Treasury also began interpreting the Glass-Steagall Act in such a way as to allow banks to set up discount stock sales and insurance operations.

The next step is to repeal Glass-Steagall entirely. Says Comptroller Conover, "I'm not sure whether [banks] ought to underwrite corporate stocks and bonds, but I don't see any reason why we shouldn't move in that direction."

Deregulation's effects.

The evidence so far suggests that banking deregulation, even in its present limited form, is having exactly the effects that Dorgan warned against. While Continental's near collapse cannot be blamed on deregulation—Continental's loan risks dated from 1973—the current spate of bank collapses and of banks judged problematic by the FDIC must be laid at least partly at deregulation's door. In 1983 there were more bank failures—48—than

in any year since 1939. And 71 banks have failed already in 1984.

Demarketing the poor.

The FDIC's regulation of banks suggested that banks were a public utility. In exchange for freedom from risk, banks were supposed to offer their customers inexpensive and efficient services. But deregulation has prompted banks to declare themselves free from any public responsibility.

In the past, the deposits of wealthier customers paid for check-cashing and other services provided for lower-income customers. But with competition of banks intensifying under deregulation, the larger banks have begun to eliminate checking and even savings accounts for lower-income customers either by refusing them service outright or by jacking up fees for bounced checks, and even check-cashing itself, to prohibitive levels. Some

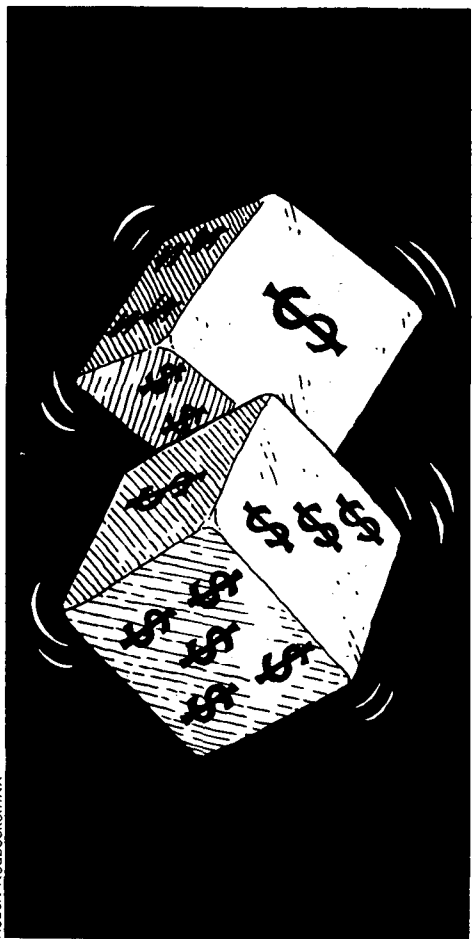
than an automated teller.)

The bankers' demarketing tactics have prompted public outrage. In New York the state legislature authorized a study of the costs to a bank of a bounced check. Upon learning that the cost was between \$5 and \$6, the legislature limited bank charges to \$7. New York is also pressuring banks to adopt "lifeline" services for low-income customers.

The heart of the argument for bank deregulation is in the model of banks as grocery stores or supermarkets. The Heritage report dismisses the contention that banks have a "unique function" within the economy that requires regulation. But in the face of growing bank failures and the Continental bailout, economists are contesting the supermarket model.

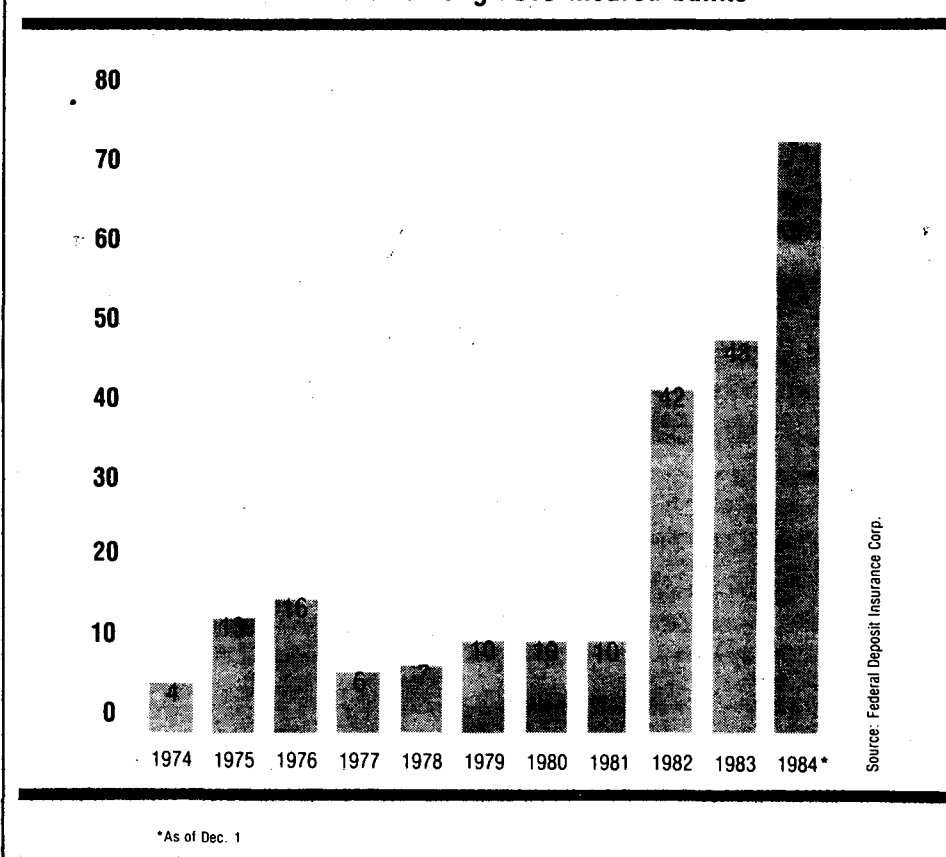
University of Massachusetts banking expert David Kotz makes the case this way: "Banks and financial institutions

In 1983 there were more bank failures—48—than in any year since 1939. So far, 71 banks have failed in 1984.



Robert Neubecker/INX

Number of bank failures among FDIC-insured banks



in any year since 1939. And 71 banks have failed already in 1984.

Deregulation of the interest rates that banks offer depositors was designed to allow banks to compete with mutual funds and other investments, which in the high-inflation '70s began to deprive banks of their wealthiest customers. But as banks have raised their interest rates to attract depositors, they have also been forced to raise the interest rates on their loans to pay for the higher costs of attracting money.

Those higher loan rates have made it more difficult for banks to find customers and have encouraged banks to devise deceptive arrangements—like the adjustable-rate mortgage—and to overlook risks. At the same time, low inflation (which makes it impossible for businesses to pass their loan costs onto their customers) and cutbacks in manufacturing, mining, oil, agriculture and real estate have threatened the ability of the banks' customers to pay back their loans. *Business Week* recently summed up the situation this way: "The strongest recovery in post-war history rests on the financial equivalent of the San Andreas Fault."

Dorgan and others argue that if dereg-

ulation is continued—if banks are once again allowed to sell stocks—then the existing instability will be magnified. As in the '20s, banks will be tempted to prop up their own corporate customers at the public's expense. Speculation will again be rife. And the risks of a new Continental crisis will be great.

banks now require an initial deposit of \$500 to open an account and charge up to \$30 for bounced checks. California, New York and Texas banks are taking the lead in what Washington's Research Council calls "demarketing" the "working middle" and the "low-income, low-education" customer. Houston's Medical Center Bank pruned away 8,000 of its 12,000 customers over the last five years, leaving only the wealthiest. The Med Center Bank's chairman Donald Neuenschwander compares banking to running a grocery store rather than a public utility. "You pay what it costs," he said. "If you can't you make other arrangements."

At the same time, the large banks are offering their wealthier customers what the *Wall Street Journal* called "Rolls Royce banking." At the Med Center customers who deposit more than \$100,000 are given private rooms, their own investment counselor and even the use of a private airplane. At New York's Citibank, customers with more than \$25,000 in the bank enjoy separate teller lines and their own account officer. (At some California banks, low-income customers must pay a charge if they want to see a live rather

are not just regular capitalist institutions," he says. "Because commercial banks create money and credit, their failure is very destabilizing and tends to set off a chain of failures. If one auto company goes down, others are strengthened. But if a bank fails, others go with it. As a result, the government can't let them fail."

Saloman Brothers' economist Henry Kaufmann poses the same problem. "When you encourage the entrepreneurial drive of the banks, the only way that drive can be disciplined is by allowing banks that have behaved improperly to fail," Kaufmann says. "That is a key issue. Are we willing as a society to have major institutions that hold savings and temporary funds fail so that the proper discipline can be exerted on them?"

Both Kotz and Kaufmann believe that bank deregulation is inappropriate. Dorgan draws the conclusions for government policy. "If war is too important to leave to the generals, banking is too important to leave solely to bankers," he says. "Banks must supply credit to their communities. Without this we all suffer. And banks must earn and keep the trust of the people."

IN SHORT

Test me, test me

Good news for blacks who are looking for jobs in the 58 occupations that rely on standardized tests for licensing—from insurance agents to welders to cytotechnologists. A recent agreement between the Educational Testing Service and Golden Rule Insurance Company may mean that those licensing tests handled by ETS will be less discriminatory. ETS was challenged because a 1976 revision of an Illinois insurance exam widened the gap between the number of blacks and whites who passed. In 1975, 40 percent of the black applicants passed, while a little more than half the whites passed. After a revision that was supposed to raise the pass rate across the board, the white success rate rose dramatically to 77 percent, while the black rate lagged behind at 52 percent.

Soon after these findings, five black Illinois applicants and Golden Rule, a national insurance company based in Illinois, sued for bias and eight years later an extensive agreement has finally been reached. The upshot of the agreement is that ETS will pre-test each question and throw out those that have the widest margin of correct answers between blacks and whites. Golden Rule's Bob Schaeffer says the same areas will be covered by the new test: "It will be a fairer exam, not an easier one." And Chuck Stone, former ETS director of minority affairs, thinks the agreement will open a floodgate for similar ones for other occupational tests. "Unless ETS voluntarily extends these reforms to their other tests, they will soon face dozens of similar lawsuits. With this agreement they've admitted that there is a fairer way to do testing."

Porn by any other name

The recent attempt to outlaw pornography in Indianapolis, Ind., on the basis that it's sexual discrimination (see *In These Times*, Nov. 14) was halted, at least temporarily, by a federal court judge last month. Judge Sarah Evans Barker said that, while she agrees with the Indianapolis City Council members' efforts to protect the rights of women with their ordinance that outlaws pornography, it violates the right of free speech. Ordinance supporters say they will appeal the ruling, while council members in various locales, including Suffolk, N.Y., Cincinnati, Des Moines and Los Angeles, await the outcome of the appeal before deciding how to rule on their proposed anti-porn legislation.

A bribe for Palau

What nation was the first to adopt a constitution that banned the storage, testing or disposal of nuclear materials? If you answered the Republic of Palau, award yourself a gold star and put away your *Trivia Mania* handbook.

According to the December issue of *Not Man Apart*, Palau's non-nuclear status may be in jeopardy. In the last few years, U.S. and Micronesian leaders have been working on a "Compact of Free Association" that, contrary to the nice-sounding name, has a few strings attached. The U.S. will give 15 years of financial aid to Palau in return for the use of the islands and water for military purposes. The U.S. will also have the right to veto any Palauan decision that might get in the way of U.S. military interests. So far the temptation has been strong—66 percent of the 7,000 voters okayed the treaty in a September plebiscite. But that still falls short of the three-fourths needed to override the non-nuclear provision. The voters may not have the last word, however. Some observers say they would not be surprised if the government, which supports the agreement, uses the two-thirds vote to get its way. In that case, the ever-wary opposition plans to sue.

Boston: Flynn cuts his losses

When Raymond Flynn was elected mayor of Boston last year he promised to fight the powerful downtown developers on behalf of Boston's neighborhoods. Most of Boston's neighborhoods have suffered in recent years, partly as a result of the preferential attention given to the downtown building boom. City residents have lost job opportunities and city services, the school system has declined precipitously and redlining has badly scarred poor and working-class neighborhoods while gentrification has reconfigured others. The disparity between Boston's rich downtown and its poor neighborhoods is increasing rapidly. But Flynn lost his first tussle with business and development interests when his tough rent-control law was gutted a few months ago. In early November, however, Flynn resorted to a new strategy, reports Thomas Kiley. He approved \$1.3 billion in new development projects but with certain conditions. Developers must make good faith efforts to ensure that 50 percent of the construction and permanent jobs go to Boston residents, 20 percent of these to minorities and 10 percent to women. Moreover, developers must make financial contributions to neighborhood projects such as job-training programs.

—Beth Maschinot

Readers are encouraged to send news clips, interesting reports, eye-opening memos or short articles to "In Short," c/o *In These Times*, 1300 W. Belmont, Chicago, IL 60657. Please include your address and telephone number.



AFSCME President Gerald McEntee and Martin Luther King's daughter Yolanda were arrested outside the South African embassy.

Regime's foes win friends

For years opponents of U.S. policy toward South Africa's apartheid regime have labored on the political margins, winning an important divestiture battle here, blocking the sale of Kruggerands there, but never mounting a national campaign.

But the escalation of political protest and repression in South Africa in recent months has touched off a wave of demonstrations here, led by the steady procession of mostly black congressmen, civil rights leaders and black and white trade unionists being arrested at the South African Embassy in Washington. By December 6, three weeks after the actions began, 27 people had been arrested and protest had spread to other major cities around the country.

The public relations success of the embassy protests has surprised even some of its organizers, provoking discussion over where the action is heading. The Free South Africa Movement, as it has been dubbed, has four official demands: freedom for leaders of South Africa's November 5 and 6 job "stay-away," who have been detained without charges (see story page 5); an end to the Reagan administration policy of "constructive engagement" with P.W. Botha's minority regime; pressure on Botha to negotiate with the country's black leadership; and the release of Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, who have been imprison-

ed since the '60s.

The embassy protests have been organized by TransAfrica, the black lobbying group founded in 1977 to promote a non-interventionist foreign policy in Africa and the Caribbean. TransAfrica founder and executive director Randall Robinson was in the first group arrested at the embassy Thanksgiving eve, along with U.S. Civil Rights Commissioner Mary Frances Berry, former Equal Employment Opportunities Commission head Eleanor Holmes Norton and Washington, D.C., congressional delegate Walter Fauntroy. Robinson and Fauntroy are credited with convincing members of the Congressional Black Caucus to present themselves for arrest, which has given the action its powerful political symbolism.

They have been joined so far by one white Congressman, Don Edwards of California, and one Hispanic, New York's Robert Garcia. At the South African consulate in New York, City Clerk David Dinkins and National Black Unified Front chair Herbert Daughtry were arrested December 3. In Chicago, Jaqueline Jackson, Rev. Jesse Jackson's wife, was arrested with local black elected officials December 6.

The AFL-CIO has cooperated with TransAfrica from the outset, and American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) President Gerald McEntee was among the first to be arrested. Now labor has taken responsibility for mounting the protests each Tuesday, and its first official action December 4 was the largest at the

embassy to date, drawing 1,000 protesters. AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Thomas Donahue, United Steelworkers President Leon Lynch and Newspaper Guild head Charles Perlik were arrested Tuesday.

Yet the movement has reached beyond labor and liberals. On December 4, 35 self-described "conservative" Congressmembers sent a letter to the South African ambassador expressing "alarm" at the increased violence and repression in his nation. Warning that the U.S. policy of constructive engagement was based on visible progress toward racial equality in South Africa, the Congressmembers said continued intransigence by the white minority regime would force them to oppose new U.S. investment there and organize international diplomatic and economic sanctions against the country. Signers included Minnesota's Vin Weber, Georgia's Newt Gingrich and Bobbi Fiedler and Edward Dornan of California.

Johnson and others believe the publicity generated by the national protests will further the existing movement for divestiture and other economic and political sanctions against South Africa. "People are calling continuously, asking what they can do," says Charles Simmons, an aide to U.S. Rep. John Conyers (D-MI) who was arrested at the embassy. "I think this will help get divestiture moving, and further the boycott of South African products."

AFL-CIO spokesperson Murray Seeger thinks the movement has to move more gradually. AFL-CIO policy calls for a "series of escalating steps" to put pressure on South Africa, and divestiture is among the last. "We have to give them time," Seeger said, to respond to domestic and U.S. protest.

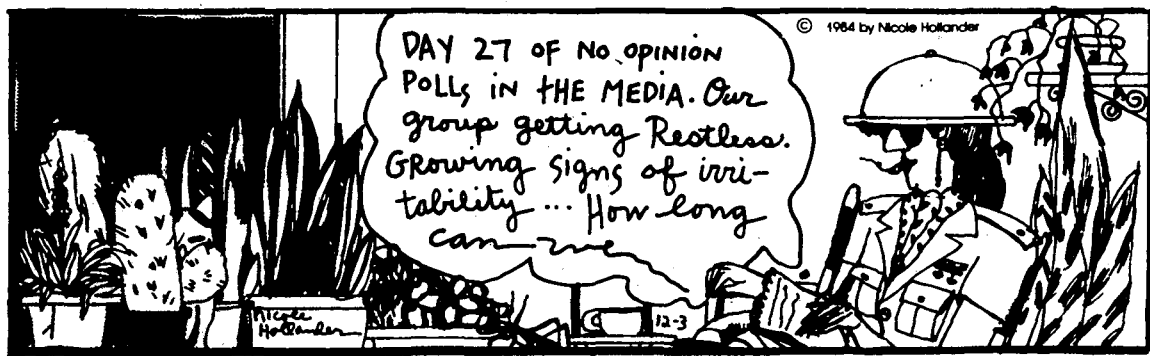
The favorable public response to the embassy arrests, with their echoes of the civil rights protests of the '60s, has started black leaders thinking about expanding the tactic to domestic areas. "Between the election results and [Nobel Prize winner] Bishop Tutu's visit, the black caucus people have been really moved," said Conyers' aide Simmons. Tutu's appeal to direct action in speeches in the Washington area "touched people like they haven't been touched in a long time," said Simmons.

Symbolic protests on economic issues, such as unemployment, could help capture some of the moral ground for those concerns that the tactic has won the apartheid movement, Simmons believes. "This is a good moral offensive and it's going to grow rapidly."

—Joan Walsh

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



SOUTH AFRICA

'New Deal' meets the new resistance

By David Goodman

This is the second of a two-part series.

JOHANNESBURG

1984 HAS BEEN A LANDMARK YEAR in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. The Botha regime found that its much heralded "reforms" of the past two years have met a sophisticated organizational resistance not seen since before the African National Congress (ANC) was banned in 1960. Chief among the regime's reforms was the new constitution that gave "colored" and Indians voting rights and limited parliamentary representation but continued to deprive the nation's 23 million blacks of a political voice.

Although Botha carried his so-called "new deal" to European leaders in the spring of 1984 and won the warm backing of President Reagan, the reception on his home front was not as cordial. During the past year new organizations of resistance have developed at three major levels: community organizations led by the United Democratic Front (UDF); the independent black trade union movement; and youth organizations led by leaders of the widespread student boycotts. In an unprecedented action, all three movements joined forces on November 5 and 6 around a set of common demands and staged a massive job stay-away in the heart of industrial South Africa (see accompanying story).

The leaders of today's black opposition are products of the 1976 Soweto uprisings. Thus it is a wiser group of nationalists that has come together over the past two years to confront the regime.

United Democratic Front.

Possibly the most significant political development during the past year has been the emergence of the UDF, launched in August 1983, as the leader of the non-white political opposition. Its purpose was to mobilize a large multi-racial constituency to oppose new constitutional elections. Currently it includes more than 600 community, youth, civic, political and trade union organizations nationwide.

The UDF has evolved from a tradition of struggle reaching back to the ANC's campaigns of the '50s. But it also bears the marks and lessons that activists have learned in the last decade.

"Since 1973 the South African government has been faced with a deepening crisis," explains Trevor Manuel, acting UDF general secretary. "In this period we saw the events of 1976 and 1980 [the Soweto uprisings and widespread township unrest and strikes]. We also saw during this time the growth of fragmented local organizations, coupled with the increase in armed resistance and the worsening economic position. In the words of P.W. [President P.W. Botha], the Nats [the ruling Nationalist Party] were forced to 'either adapt or die.'

"It was out of this process of so-called reform that the new constitution became reality," he continues. "It attempts to co-opt colored and Indians while driving a wedge between these groups and the African majority. This notion of reform forced the South African government to create a certain amount of [political] space. It was this space that the UDF moved into and broadened the terrain on which it could work."

There was considerable debate among leaders of black organizations about the wisdom of forming a visible national organization that would confront the government's new constitutional reforms. "People [in the liberation struggle] resisted any form of visible national struc-

ture," explains the Rev. Frank Chikane, a member of the UDF national executive. "Even up to six months before the UDF's launching, the greater part of the progressive community was against any national organization because it was so risky." Black leaders had seen many national

ordinate the national opposition. Affiliate organizations of the UDF were to "take up UDF activities in ways suited to their own activities and constituencies," with the Front acting in a national coordinating role.

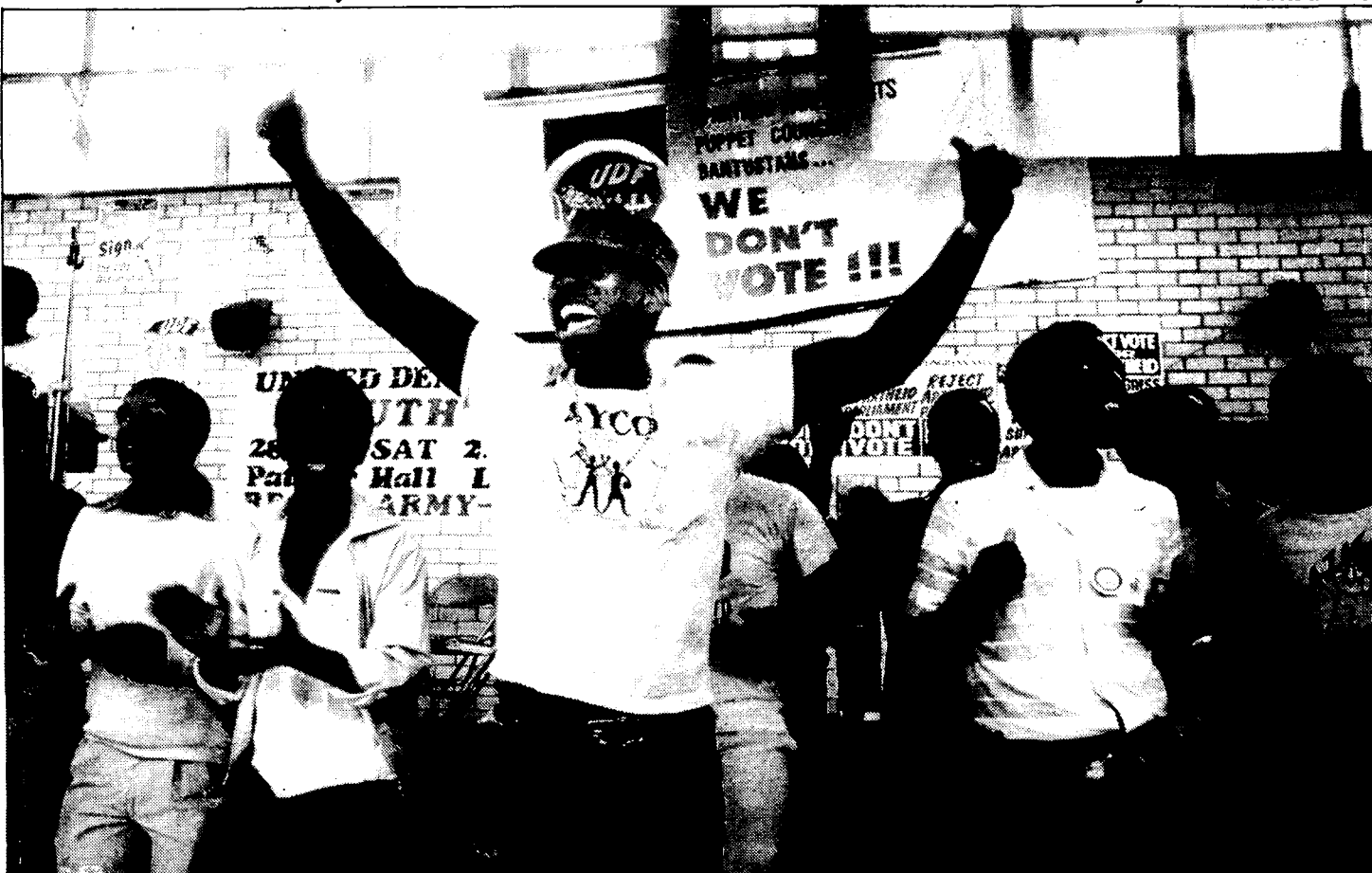
The results of the tri-cameral parliament elections held in August are a testimony to the UDF's success at mobilizing a nationwide constituency across racial lines. Only 17 percent of eligible colored voters showed up at the polls and a mere 15 percent of eligible Indian voters cast a vote (See *In These Times*, Dec. 5).

The elections forced the government to take the opposition seriously. Several prominent UDF leaders were detained indefinitely, including the general secretary and publicity secretary. Currently seven members of the UDF national executive

IN THESE TIMES DECEMBER 12-18, 1984 5 was a single body with a high level of organization based primarily in urban centers," explains Manuel. "The UDF, on the other hand, is a front that lends itself to somewhat independent initiatives from its affiliates. So we have resistance popping up all over the country, spearheaded by UDF affiliates. The UDF acts as a bridge between different struggles." The new lines of communication and cooperation between the 600 UDF affiliates across the country cannot be broken, he insists.

But Frank Chikane warns that a UDF ban would send an ominous message to black people. "If that happens people will be convinced that armed struggle is the only way to change the present situation."

Some South African leftists have criticized the UDF. Major unions such as the



Students chant freedom songs at a United Democratic Front rally held in late August.

movements rise up, only to be banned by the state and their leaders arrested. This had been the experience of the ANC and the Pan African Congress, both banned in 1960, as well as the organizations behind the black consciousness movement, banned in 1977. "People came to feel that high-profile politics served no purpose because leaders would just get detained," notes Chikane.

But as the government's intentions to push through its new constitution became clear, it was also clear that a unified political machine would be necessary to co-

ordinate the national opposition. Affiliate organizations of the UDF were to "take up UDF activities in ways suited to their own activities and constituencies," with the Front acting in a national coordinating role.

The UDF's structure is deliberately and uniquely adapted to the nation's repressive political environment. "The difference between the UDF as it exists today and the ANC of 1960 is that the ANC

committee are being detained without trials, plus three UDF leaders are under house arrest in the British consulate in Durban. Minister of Law and Order Louis LeGrange has accused the UDF of being a front for the ANC—a charge that the UDF denies—and rumors abound that the UDF is on the verge of being banned.

General Workers Union and the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) have lent their "moral and political support" to the UDF, but have declined to formally affiliate. Their position is that as single-class organizations, their primary interest is in uniting the working class into a strong federation. FOSATU also points out that it supports a wide range of political organizations and to side with one might cause divisions.

Another organization, called the National Forum, has also disagreed with

Continued on page 6

Unions hold job stay-away

On November 5-6 more than 300,000 workers took part in a job stay-away in the Transvaal, a major industrial province. They were joined by more than 400,000 students who boycotted classes for two days. The stay-away was called by the two largest black trade union federations, FOSATU and CUSA, in support of student demands and community group protests. Unionized factories were hardest hit by the job action. Seventy percent of unionized companies had a stay-away rate of more than 80 percent.

"This action was undertaken because the situation is very serious—in our view, close to civil war—and needed clear protest action," explains FOSATU Education Secretary Alec Erwin to the *Financial Mail*. "COSAS came up with the original demands. We chose to back them and added other issues, like getting the army out of the townships."

The demands of the stay-away leaders not only included the COSAS demands but also a call for security forces to be withdrawn from the townships; no increase in township rents, service charges and bus fares; reinstatement of 461 workers who were fired by a leading snackfood company. (The latter demand was met as a result of separate

negotiations.)

"Hitherto the major trade unions have focused on factory floor issues, avoiding involvement in more overtly political issues," wrote the Labor Monitoring Group (LMG), a group of six Johannesburg academics whose analysis of the stay-away has been widely reported in the South African press. "The state's failure to adequately respond to the educational demands of the students and the growing crisis in the townships have propelled the trade unions beyond the factory floor."

The LMG points out that the "significance of this stay-away in comparison with the student-led stay-aways of 1976 was the active involvement and leading role of organized labor.... The stay-away brought together the major opposition forces to apartheid in the Transvaal—groups that had not previously worked together."

The Botha regime's response was predictable: 12 organizers of the stay-away have been detained without trial, including CUSA General Secretary Phiroshaw Camay and FOSATU President Chris Dlamani. In addition, 23 people died during the two days, most as a result of police action.

But due to the "highly organized and

democratic structures" of the new unions, argues the LMG, "any policy of repression, of attempting to 'behead' these organizations by detaining leaders, is much less likely to be successful."

Among the most significant reactions to the stay-away has been that of business people. Minister of Law and Order Louis LeGrange was sharply criticized by the South African business community in response to the detentions of the top FOSATU and CUSA leaders, both of whom have established working relationships with many business leaders. In a joint statement released in mid-November, the Association of Chambers of Commerce, the Afrikaanse Mandesinstituit (a very conservative, pro-government organization) and the Federated Chamber of Industries warned the government that detentions of the unionists "threatened labor peace."

Each of the three groups has since held top-level meetings with government ministers to lodge their protests. "Businessmen must stand up and be counted," said supermarket magnate Raymond Ackerman. "We have to fight discrimination and influx control and detentions at home." These statements are an indication that unions have become an accepted feature of the South African business landscape and that business is all too aware of the consequences of shattering some of the delicately balanced labor-management truces.

—D.G.

Continued from preceding page

some UDF positions. The National Forum adheres to a more Marxist analysis of the struggle in South Africa, believing ethnic organizations such as the Natal Indian Congress (a major UDF affiliate) to be counter-productive since the struggle must be led by the working class.

With the success of the election boycott behind it, the UDF faces the future somewhat uncertainly. Currently it is addressing a range of issues, from the township unrest and detentions without trial (the thrust of the so-called Durban Six occupation of the British Consulate) to a recent call to end conscription. The challenge for the UDF is to strengthen the local struggles of its affiliates, according to Manuel.

Black trade union movement.

The steady rise of the independent black trade union movement continued throughout 1984, reaching a critical juncture this fall. Official statistics show that there were three times as many strikes between January and May 1984 as during the same period last year, with five times as many strikers involved in the disputes. Labor militance came to a head in September when the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) called the first legal strike by a black union in South African history.

At issue were wage demands and recognition of the union. On the latter point, the NUM dispelled any doubts about its support among mineworkers: 50,000

miners dropped their tools in response to its call, closing down many mines.

The rise of the independent black trade unions goes back to 1979, when changes recommended by the Wiehahn Commission were put into law. The so-called Wiehahn reforms provided the basis for the legal recognition of African trade unions. Previously African workers were excluded from the legal definition of "employee" and were therefore ineligible to join unions. Though blacks did organize unions, led since 1955 by the ANC-affiliated South African Congress of Trade Unions, they were never recognized by the state. Until 1979, blacks could only be legal members of "parallel unions," which are relatively powerless puppet bodies under the paternalistic wing of a legal white, Indian or colored trade union. Until now apartheid trade unionism had been the regime's method for dividing the working class and diverting class conflict into racial strife.

Since 1979, membership in independent (as distinct from dependent parallel unions, which still exist) black unions has climbed steadily. The Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) now consists of nine member unions with 106,000 members. The Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA), the other major union federation, now has 11 unions in its ranks with 100,000 members. CUSA is also the largest affiliate of the UDF.

The origins of this fall's mineworkers strike date back to July 1982. At that time 100 miners were killed and thousands of others deported when riots and

strikes over pay increases broke out throughout the mining industry. These events led to the formation of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) several months later.

In May of this year the NUM and the Chamber of Mines, which represents the large mining corporations, began negotiations on a new wage package. In 1982 the average monthly income of a black mineworker was \$251 per month, while the average for white miners at that time was \$1,221 per month. In May, the NUM demanded 60 percent wage increases, but the Chamber offered less than 8 percent.

By June, the NUM lowered its demand to 25 percent and the Chamber increased its offer to 14 percent. The two sides deadlocked, and the Chamber decided it would unilaterally institute its wage increase package on July 1. The NUM declared a legal dispute with the Chamber, and sporadic wildcat strikes were held throughout July and August (it is unclear whether these strikes were authorized by the union).

By early September the NUM and Chamber settled the coal mine dispute and shortened the work week, but the gold mine negotiations were deadlocked. The Chamber claimed the NUM didn't have the miners' backing to strike. On September 14, 43,000 miners voted to stage a legal strike, which lasted about a week. More than 40,000 miners walked off their jobs, despite a threat by the Chamber that there were 300,000 unemployed people in the homelands who could be brought in to replace the striking

unionists. In the course of the strike, police killed 10 miners.

The final wage package included a 17 percent increase for the miners. Viewed in the short term, the size of the wage increase was not a significant victory for the miners, nor was the price paid in lost lives an encouraging sign. But the long range gains for the NUM and the trade union movement as a whole are considerable. The NUM's ability to be recognized and then organize and strike a strategic industry in which all unrest had been ruthlessly crushed in the past is a major step forward. And its strategy of testing legal avenues for labor disputes sets a precedent that many other unions should now be able to build upon.

The growth of the trade union movement comes at a time of increasing economic recession in South Africa. Inflation is expected to hit 13 percent this month and the dollar value of the rand has hit an all-time low. The drought in the region has caused a major drop in agricultural output, forcing South Africa to shift from being a major net food exporter in 1982 to being a food importer since 1983. And major losses have been suffered in the metal and auto industries as well. This has meant the loss of more than 70,000 jobs in the metal industry alone. Yet apartheid labor policies insure that the brunt of this recession is borne by blacks: of people registered as unemployed in June, 96 percent were black.

Unionists remain optimistic about the future, however. "The recession has strengthened the trade union movement on the whole," says Dave Lewis, general secretary of the 16,000-member General Workers Union. "There is a huge political imperative on the part of people to join unions. People need more protection than before in work situations. So there hasn't been any decrease in our ability to attract new members. But the recession is a Catch-22 for us. The last six months were the best time we've had for organizing, yet it coincided with 1,000 of our members losing their jobs."

One development on the labor front is
Continued on page 15

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WESTERN EUROPEAN UNION

By Diana Johnstone

THE MILITARY ALLIANCE OF core NATO countries, called the Western European Union (WEU), held its 30th anniversary meeting in Rome in late October without any significant protest from the European peace movement.

The proposal made in Perugia last July by Green Bundestag member Roland Vogt—that the peace movement hold an educational conference in Rome at the same time in order to focus on the dangers in the WEU project—was taken over and diluted by European peace movement leaders who still seem to be making up their minds about the WEU. WEU critics, such as the German Greens and the small Italian party *Democrazia Proletaria*, were kept out of the preparations for a “vigilance” conference at which movement personalities from various European countries made speeches on various topics. The German leftist daily *Die Tageszeitung* called it “aimless peace palaver.”

At a Paris press conference a few days later, Sylvie Mantrant of the French nuclear disarmament committee CODENE, explained that the independent European peace movement's position on the WEU was still “hazy.” They want to see what is meant by the “European cooperation” in defense matters that the WEU is promoting. A report is scheduled for the European Nuclear Disarmament (END) conference in Amsterdam next year.

Meanwhile, the movements preparing the Amsterdam meeting prefer to concentrate on stopping American missiles in Holland and Belgium, where they still see the possibility of a refusal of American cruise missile deployment.

One reason for peace movement hesitation to condemn the WEU is its potential arms control function. One of the WEU's inter-governmental institutions is Europe's only Arms Control Agency (ACA), set up to enable the other member countries—France, Britain, Italy and the Benelux states—to monitor West German rearmament. But so far the most significant result of the French-sponsored WEU revival has been to drastically reduce its arms control role.

This year West German rockets have entered the worldwide arms race as a result of the WEU decision to eliminate the post-war ban on German production of long-range missiles. This could prove to be one of the most significant steps in the NATO arms modernization program that got underway with the famous December 1979 “double decision” to station U.S. Pershing II and cruise missiles in Europe.

Although German industry showed lively interest in cruise missile development in the late '70s, any sudden decision at that time to produce long-range missiles in the Federal Republic would have been politically impossible. Today, however, in the wake of the controversial U.S. missile deployments and amid calls for European independence from the superpowers, it has been politically easy to lift the last remaining restrictions on West German conventional arms production, including missiles.

German industry is ready to take off. German know-how that developed the V1 and V2 “buzz bomb” rockets during World War II in the secret factory at Peenemunde has not been lost, even if some of the experts have gone on to lead the U.S.' space program. The *Orbit-Transport Aktiengesellschaft* (OTRAG), set up in 1974, took on former Peenemunde director Kurt Debus as its supervisory board chairman and Peenemunde engineer Richard F. Gomperts as its construction chief. Several former SS officers also reportedly worked for the secretive company, which apparently functioned as a research and development front and money-losing tax write-off for arms industry giants such as Messerschmitt-Bölkow-Blohm (MBB). In 1974, OTRAG made a contract with Zaire reserving exclusive use of air space for testing over an area roughly the size of Austria. There were reports in 1976 and 1977 that OTRAG was developing cruise mis-

Germany enters the arms race with rocket production

siles. Since the WEU banned production in Germany of any projectile with a range of over 32 kilometers, missile parts were flown from an airport near Stuttgart for assembly in Africa.

The huge African proving ground began to cause diplomatic problems for Bonn after Angola President Agostinho Neto complained in August 1977 that “the presence of West German missiles in Zaire is an immediate threat to the Angolan revolution.” The flap over the Zaire firing range may have made German industry feel cramped by the WEU restrictions. In the future there will be no need to assemble parts in remote places.

Now the problem is to get the Bundestag to vote the appropriations for the new generation of high technology conventional weapons, notably “smart” missiles. The Greens estimate the price tag will run to 240 billion marks (close to \$100 billion). Many Social Democrats agree with the Greens that the government arms modernization plan means tearing down the welfare state to pay for weapons that will increase the danger of war by shifting NATO strategy to the “deep strike” offensive posture advocated by NATO commander General Bernard Rogers.

But the Social Democratic Party (SPD) is divided. Many Social Democrats seem ready to buy the argument that a conventional arms buildup is the price to pay for reducing dependence on nuclear arms. But the price tag on the “emerging technologies” may simply be too high.

Aside from its Arms Control Agency with a permanent staff of 52, the WEU has a Standing Armaments Committee (SAC) with an international secretariat of 28 whose function is to facilitate joint arms production deals and sales—a matter close to the hearts of French leaders. There is also a WEU Assembly made up of 89 delegates and 89 alternates representing the parliaments of the seven member countries. As a recent Belgian government memo points out, the Assembly has the potential—but long unexploited—capacity to “sensitize public opinion” in member countries to military-security issues. The Belgian memo suggested that in the future, member states should take measures to see to it that “parliamentarians experienced in defense and security matters” are sent to the Assembly.

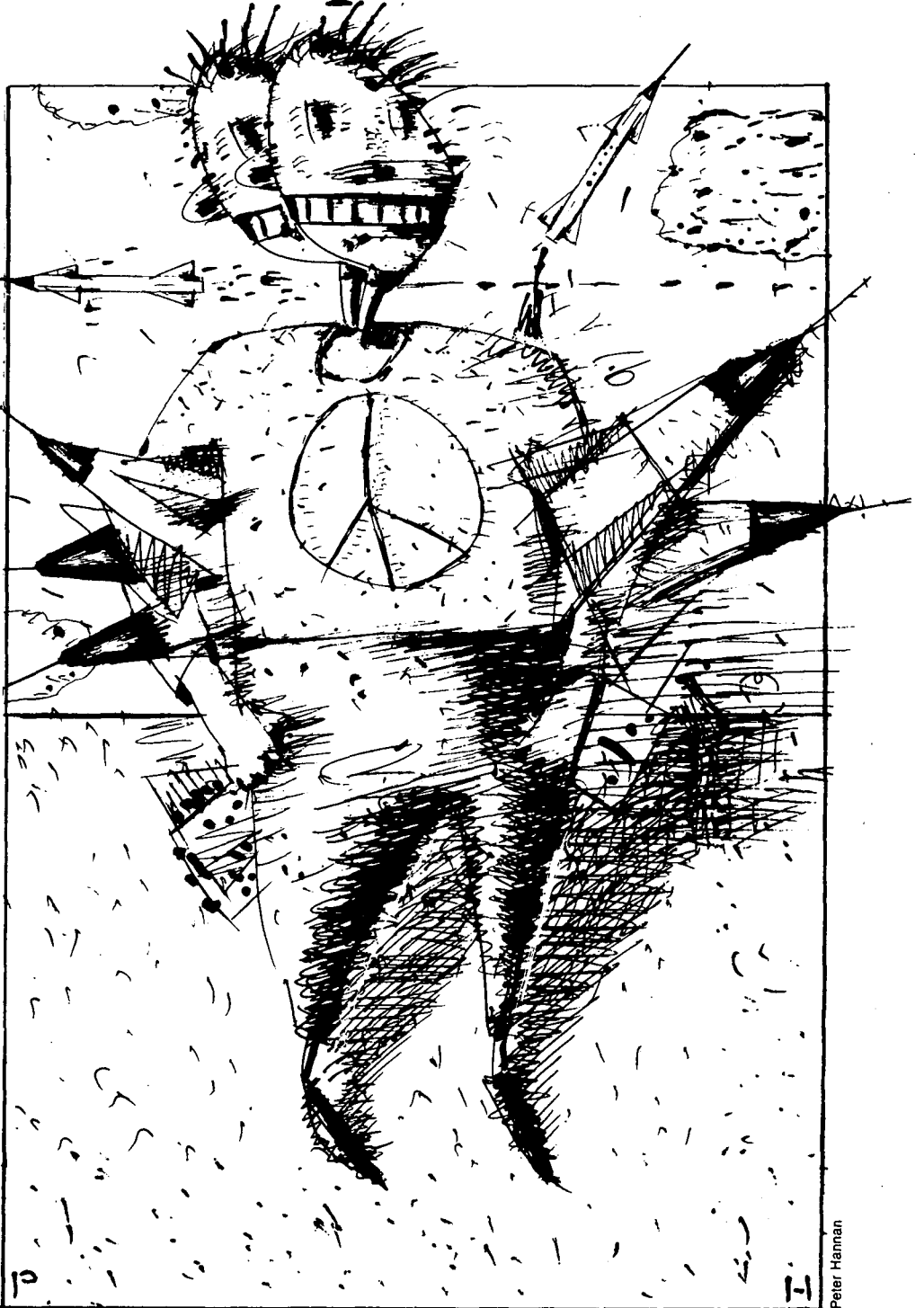
On June 12 the WEU declared that the essential function of the Assembly was to associate European public opinion with the effort member nations must make to ensure their security. The WEU Assem-

Cruise missile deployment and a European move to independence opened the door.

bly seems destined to be used to help develop an arms lobby within European parliaments comparable to that within the U.S. Congress.

The Assembly itself has been kept under-informed about what is going on. A September confidential report by an Italian member to the Assembly's general affairs committee complained of having to work on the basis of “only vague knowledge of a fluctuating situation.” The Assembly is apparently expected to “sell” policy decisions, not to help make nor even to understand them.

The confidential Assembly report ex-



pressed puzzlement over the French-proposed changes in the function of the Arms Control Agency. The report noted that the ACA is the only European agency with the accumulated information and experts potentially enabling it to play some eventual role in international arms control. Besides checking on West German compliance with the long list of conventional arms restrictions now being lifted, the ACA kept track of Allied troop levels. This entailed checking to make sure that Britain was keeping its Rhine Army up to promised levels. France, however, unilaterally refused to allow ACA monitoring of French nuclear weapons.

According to the French proposal, the ACA will in fact drop its arms control functions in order to “reflect on problems of verification.” This may have something to do with the fact that the French—whose desire to develop new technology far exceeds their knowledge of what to do with it—have for some time entertained hopes of getting a head start in the development of satellites for arms control verification purposes. This relatively good idea risks being left far behind by the cruise missile race.

At the Rome meeting in October, West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher did confirm that the WEU will study and research space technology.

One factor muting criticism of the WEU has been the impression that its revival somehow represents an attempt to assert European independence from the superpowers. This illusion may have been prompted by the mere fact that it was France, complete with Gaullist rhetorical flourishes against “Yalta” and the superpowers, that pressed for WEU revival. It

has further been promoted by the opposition of the British and Dutch governments, who consistently prefer American hegemony in Europe to the possible rise of a continental power, whether France or Germany or both.

But this Anglo-Dutch reticence has done nothing to block the WEU's main move—lifting of the German arms ban—and cannot have much effect in the future. This is because, first of all, the U.S. strongly (if somewhat discreetly) supports the revitalization of the WEU as a way to get Europeans to spend more on weapons. And second, because the Anglo-Dutch attitude only annoys the other European members who, as the confidential report stated, see Franco-German cooperation as a “warning” that if they do not take part “they will have no grounds to complain about the development of Franco-German bilateralism.”

The early rhetoric suggesting independence from both “superpowers” and blocs has faded fast. The June 12 memo stressed the “constant strengthening of Soviet military power” as a “subject of major preoccupation.” In reality, the WEU can only sharpen the division of Europe between NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

Probably the most significant fact about the WEU is that, unlike NATO, there are no geographical limits to the alliance. That means it can be invoked outside of Europe, in case of armed conflict in the Mideast, in Africa or elsewhere in the Third World. The WEU is the perfect framework for a European superpower ready to strike southward to protect “European interests” in the Third World, such as control of oil or uranium resources.

By Salim Muwakkil

No more tears... We must harden our tears to icicles and use them to freeze the senseless violence in our communities.

—Anna Langford, Chicago alderman at funeral of Ben Wilson Jr.

Benjamin "Benjy" Wilson Jr., 17, was murdered last month as he walked near his high school on Chicago's South Side. He was shot twice with a .22-caliber pistol and one bullet severed his aorta.

The suspects in his murder are two black, 16-year-old boys who were freshmen at a neighboring school. Statistically, the incident was nothing unusual; it merely underlined the distressing fact that young black men have become their own worst enemies. But Wilson also happened to be one of the best—if not *the* best—high school basketball players in the U.S. His star status provoked widespread interest in the incident and national attention became focused, once again, on the perplexing problem of black-on-black violence.

According to police reports, Wilson and two female classmates at Simeon Vocational High School were walking near the school during a lunch break when he bumped into three teenagers who were intentionally blocking the sidewalk. Wilson reportedly said, "Excuse me," and one of the three allegedly said, "Ain't no 'excuse me' today," pulled a gun and summarily fired three shots, two of which hit the 6'8" basketball star. He died the next day.

Wilson was perhaps the best known high school athlete in Chicago. As a well-publicized junior last year he led his team to the Illinois state championship and he was being fiercely recruited by most of the nation's top colleges. In addition to being widely admired for his skills on the basketball court, Wilson was also well-liked for other qualities. At a memorial service held at his high school, thousands of people, mostly young, came to pay their respects to their fallen hero.

"Benjy always had time for people," explained Tippi Hyde, a 17-year-old De Paul University student who was one of Wilson's closest friends and who spoke on behalf of the Wilson family at his funeral. "Everybody who knew him really liked him because he was so outgoing and because he was also so positive. It may sound corny, or like I'm trying to nominate him for sainthood or something, but really, just being around Benjy was inspirational. He always made you want to do better."

On a chilly afternoon in late November, crowds estimated in excess of 10,000 people extended for blocks outside of Operation PUSH's national headquarters where Wilson's funeral was held. Most of the mourners didn't know Ben Wilson, and though they realized there was little chance of gaining entrance to the packed PUSH auditorium, they were content to listen to the three-hour ceremony through truck-mounted speakers.

They huddled silently in the cold, everything immobile but their grimacing expressions and their flowing tears. Several admitted they didn't quite know why they came. It was as if they were drawn to Wilson's funeral for some mysterious reason they still couldn't fathom; perhaps they were hoping for some transcendental, grief-inspired answer that would halt the vicious cycle of violence that claimed his life. Many of the mourners told *In These Times* that the prominence accorded Wilson's death helped them realize just how routine has become the killing of black men by other black men.

"This boy's death is a tragic symbol of all that has gone wrong within urban black America," said John Dunham, a resident of Joliet, Ill., who traveled 50 miles just to stand in the cold for two hours and be counted. "It's also a loud, strong cry for action."

Inside the PUSH auditorium there were many other cries for action. Speakers, including Mayor Harold Washington and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, all urged a change in the community status quo. Calling Wilson the kind of "extraordinary young man who comes along once

in a lifetime," Mayor Washington, his voice occasionally cracking with emotion, said, "We must put an end to this gang violence and senseless attacks that stalk Chicago like a man-eater in the night. It is our duty to change this senseless violence and we've known all along that it was our duty. But now we can't escape it."

The Rev. Jackson struck a similar note: "All of the other murders we didn't react to set the stage for this one," he said. "We are losing more lives in the streets of America than we lost in the jungles of Vietnam.... There may be an explanation—based upon environment, sociology, *Thousands of students wait in line for Ben Wilson's memorial service.*

economics, split-level justice—but no justification. These senseless murders must end."

Although he took the opportunity to blast the covert war in Nicaragua and U.S.-South African ties, Jackson concentrated most of his ire on the internal problems that plague the black community. "I understand the system we're in," he said, "but I also understand the system that must be within us."

With varying degrees of ferocity, other speakers stressed the same theme of black self-responsibility and a no-nonsense approach to criminal activity. Even the idea of passing a city ordinance giving police stop-and-frisk powers (a risky proposition indeed, considering the reputation of

Chicago's Finest) met little dissent. Had someone been brash enough to caution the crowd against violating civil liberties they may well have been booed. Many expressed very definite ideas of what should be done to the young suspects. That they should be tried as adults was among the most benign of their comments.

William Moore has been charged with firing the shots that killed Wilson, and Omar Dixon has been charged as an accessory. Police have labeled them as gang members, but their friends dispute that designation.

"They weren't no gang bangers," explained a 16-year-old named Teddy, who said he knew both suspects well. "They just wanted to go for bad. Sometimes you have to go for bad just to stay out of gangs."

Moore (Lil' Billy), a freshman at Calumet High School, located just a few blocks from Simeon, is described as a shy, quiet boy who was raised in relative privilege. "He was spoiled sick by his parents and his grandparents," explained his aunt. "They never let him want for anything much and they always stuck by him. Sometimes," she said, "they stuck by him too much." She noted that Moore was strongly attached to his father, who died last September.

For most of his life, Moore has lived in a comfortable, family-owned bungalow located in a well-maintained, black working-class neighborhood, with both his parents and his maternal grandparents. "Lil' Billy was the main reason we bought this home and moved away from the problems over on the east side where we used to live," Moore's grandmother told *In These Times*.

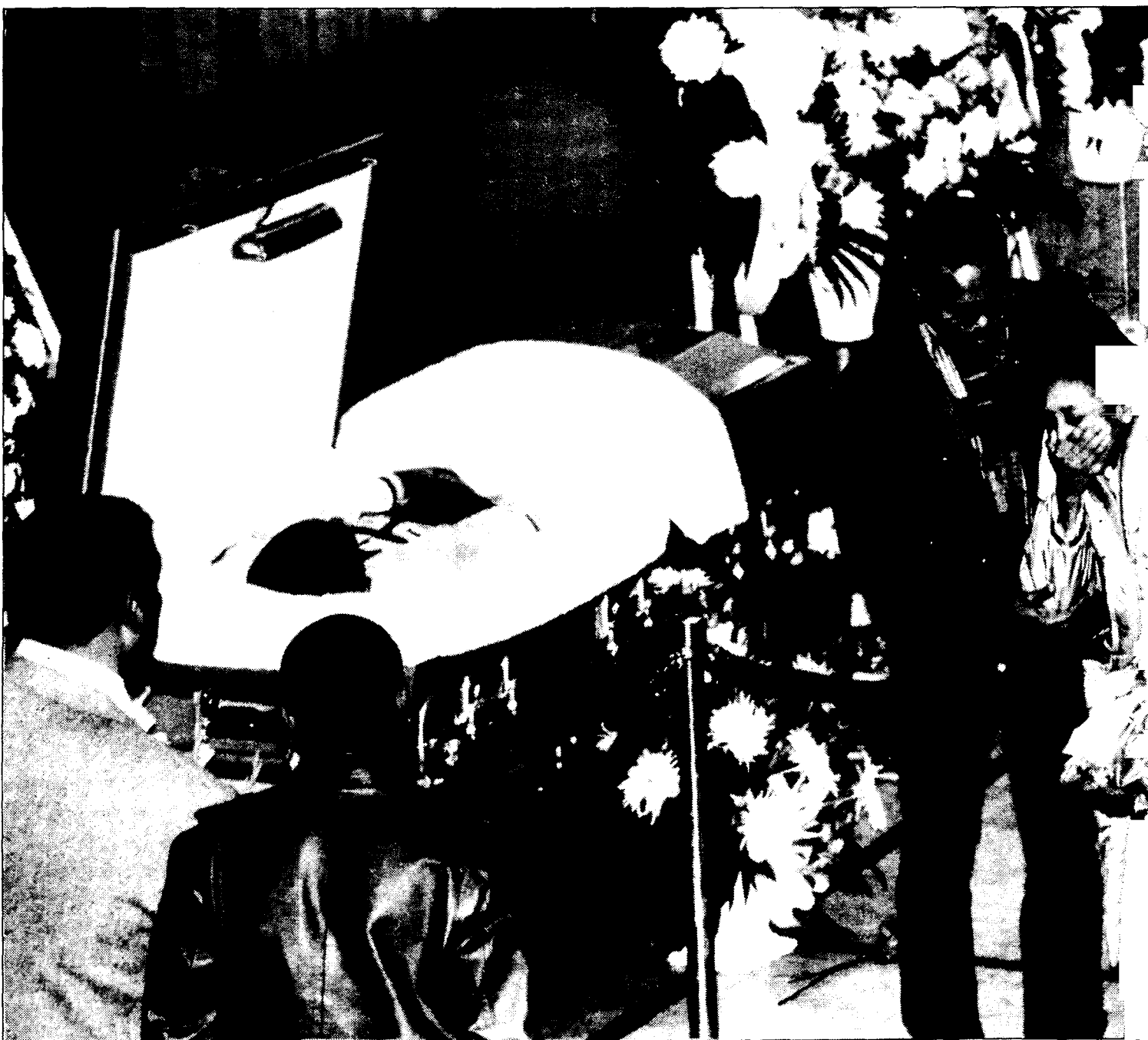
"We had such high hopes and dreams for him. He was a New Year's baby, born on New Year's Day. But dreams can easily go up in smoke in a city like Chicago." His family was understandably stunned by what happened—his grandfather said he cried continuously for two days following the incident—but they intend to stand resolutely by his side. Moore was no gang member, his family insisted, but, they concede, he may have succumbed to what one of them called the "code of the streets."

And, despite the avalanche of gang-related headlines provided by the local media (hysterically led, of course, by Rupert Murdoch's *Chicago Sun-Times*)



LIFE IN THE U.S.

Slaying of 'Benjy' Wilson accents violence epidemic



and the welter of anti-gang programs being frantically proposed by various politicians, it is this code of the streets—not gangs—that is killing young black men at such an alarming rate.

Police figures indicate that gang-related homicides in Chicago are actually down from last year's number. Of the 631 homicides committed as of October 31 of this year, 60 are listed as gang-related. Last year the numbers were 68 of 609 for the same period.

Two decades of neglect.

According to a 1980 study by law professors Norval Morris and Michael Tonry, homicide was the leading cause of death for black men and women between the ages of 25 and 34.

- Black men from 25 through 44 years of age were 11 times more likely to be victims of homicide than were white men in the same age category.

- While only one of every nine Americans was black, one of every two male murder victims was black—as was one of every two people arrested for murder.

- Blacks were two-and-a-half times more likely than whites to be victims of rape or robbery.

A more recent study conducted by Atlanta's Center for Disease Control found that black men between the ages of 20 to 24 had a one-in-three chance of being a victim of homicide. For the general population, those figures were one-in-150.

"What we're seeing here is the result of two decades of neglect," explained Earl Durham, assistant professor of social work at the University of Illinois. Durham has had several years of experience in working with street gangs and was involved in some of the earliest government attempts to combat the problem.

"We're witnessing the rise of an underclass that has no relationship whatsoever to the mainstream of American society. The unemployment rate of black youth has been up above 30 percent for the last 20 years; in many places it reaches above 65 percent. The poverty rate is increasing. More than half the children born in the black inner cities are born to unwed, teenaged mothers. Schools are failing in the education of our children. It provides them with very few marketable skills. What the hell do they expect these people to do? Why is everyone so surpris-



Ted Gray

ed by this outbreak of violence?" Durham asked.

"But instead of looking at the problem and realizing that it calls for a massive outlay of resources and a mobilization of the best minds and talents—a sort of domestic Marshall Plan, if you will—our leaders sic the cops on the kids. It's such a terribly short-term approach. I fear the solution may be beyond the scope of how the system operates—that is, if someone can't make a profit, then it doesn't get done. All we have to do is not build one B-1 or cut about a half foot from the next nuclear sub, and we'll have the money," Durham said.

As Chicago's first black mayor, Harold Washington undoubtedly realizes that the problems of criminality in the black community are those that demand a long-term commitment of resources (resources he knows are not politically feasible) and that a heavy-handed show of police force is almost criminally superficial. Yet he is obliged to make that show of police force. Although his budget proposals called for a reduction in police personnel, the uproar over Wilson's death has caused him to reverse field.

"I have never in my life seen the response and the reaction to certain kinds of crimes as we have seen in the response and the reaction to gang crimes over the past several weeks," Washington said in explaining his about face. Washington's reaction vividly illustrates how all vote-seeking politicians must forego substance for style and avoid following their own best instincts lest they enter into a political *cul de sac*.

Professor John Hope Franklin of Duke University is one of the foremost chroniclers of African-American history and a past president of the mainstream Organization of American Historians. The eminent professor is a politically moderate man, rarely given to doomsaying. But these were Franklin's recent thoughts about the future: "I am terrified at the growing alienation of that great mass of unemployed and underemployed people. I am absolutely terrified!" He thinks the U.S. could well take a totalitarian turn unless drastic measures are soon taken to deal with the problems of the festering black underclass.

"I don't see how this country can re-

Grieving mourners file past Wilson's body at memorial service.

main a viable, open and moral society, when we are raising a whole generation of people who don't work, who have not ever worked and who will become maybe middle-aged or older without ever having worked.... If a man has never worked and has no stake in society, he doesn't have any obligation to that society. He may think that he should rob and steal with impunity. And I'm not sure that I can argue with him very successfully," Franklin bemoaned.

In a recent article in the *New York Times Magazine*, Claude Brown, author of the 1965 classic *Manchild in the Promised Land* provides a chilling portrait of life for a black "manchild" in the Harlem of the '80s. In the piece Brown recounts a talk he had with a young inmate doing time for robbery and he heard Franklin lose the argument:

"Look at it from my point of view," the inmate told Brown. "Let's say I go and get wiped [killed]. Then I ain't got no more needs, right? O.K., supposin' I get popped, shot in the spine and paralyzed for the rest of my life—that could happen playin' football, you know. Then I won't need a whole lot of money because I won't be able to go no place and do nothin', right? So, I'll be on welfare, and the welfare check is all the money I need, right? Now, if I get busted and end up in the joint pullin' a dime and a nickle, like I am, then I don't have to worry about no bucks, no clothes. I get free rent and three squares a day. So you see...I really can't lose."

Although Brown is himself an alumnus of Harlem's mean streets, he was astonished and frightened by the attitudes he discovered among today's young black men. "I had been talking to young men in the prisons and on the ghetto streets—prisons with invisible bars—but I wasn't comprehending what they were telling me," Brown wrote. "Perhaps what I was hearing was too mind-boggling, too ghastly to understand: 'Murder is in style now.'"

Generational problem.

Why has this happened to the black community? What was black leadership doing while these problems festered and proliferated? There are several credible explanations, including the following:

- The successive waves of black migration to the cities of the industrial North

were propelled by the prospect of employment in smokestack industries. Jobs in that sector have been steadily declining as the country shifted away from smokestacks toward high-tech and service sectors. Because many black men lacked the training and education to fill these new job vacancies, because women were beginning to enter the workforce in increasing numbers and because of institutional racism, black male unemployment has remained quite high. Unemployment among black youth has, as Earl Durham pointed out, hovered near the 50 percent level for more than two decades.

- Underfunded and overlooked, urban school systems are failing to adequately educate minority children. Not only are these youth not learning marketable skills, but their rate of functional literacy is declining.

- The net of social support systems (extending families, community service groups, church services, etc.) has become increasingly unraveled by the ravages of urban life. Some analysts blame desegregation for accelerating this development. They argue that dropping racial barriers in housing enabled and encouraged black achievers to desert their communities, leaving them bereft of positive role models and adequate resources.

- Black leadership became so bound to a narrow civil rights agenda that they were often blind to any possible negative effects of the programs they championed (e.g., the cycle of welfare dependency). Also, in their zeal to avoid "blaming the victim for the crime," black leadership often de-emphasized the role of social responsibility, allowing an irresponsible "blame the white man" attitude to proliferate. It wasn't until very recently, for example, that the major civil rights organizations decided to include crime as an agenda item at their annual conferences. The problem of teenaged and one-parent families was assiduously shunned until the problem became so acute it simply had to be discussed.

- Most psychologists familiar with black-on-black crime phenomena agree that a lack of self-regard lies at the root of the problem. The effort to develop a strong sense of ethnic pride and self-worth, which fueled the black movement of the '60s, has not been successful.

"This terrible situation simply cannot be resolved in one generation," noted Dr. Theophilus Green, a black psychotherapist who is noted for his research into the causes of black-on-black violence. "If we truly want to deal with the problem we have to start with those children who are not yet born and provide a program of basic prenatal nutrition for their parents. Then we have to teach them how to provide their children with affection and love. We have to teach them that brutal punishment is not the way to discipline a child. There's so much involved and the problem is so complex and multifaceted, I almost hesitate to discuss it unless I can give it the comprehensive kind of discussion it warrants."

The left has been characteristically ambivalent about this problem. Since much of the current discussion of the issue is centered on cultural aspects (or, to use the current vernacular, "social issues") and since the left has apparently ceded such issues to the political right, it has not much to contribute to the debate. This absence of a compelling voice from the left has created a vacuum that is being filled by the fundamentalism of the Moral Majority and other groups of the New Right.

In the black community, this vacuum is being filled by para-military, black nationalist groups like Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam (NOI). In fact, much of the appeal of these groups lies in their ability to transform the anti-social behavior of those who cause so much distress in the black community. That appeal was highlighted during the funeral of Ben Wilson. When one of the speakers briefly mentioned Farrakhan's name in a passing reference to the crime-free emphasis of the NOI, the crime-weary crowd surrounding the PUSH building greeted it with a round of applause that echoed loudly through the neighborhood. ■



LETTERS

In These Times is an independent newspaper committed to democratic pluralism and to helping build a popular movement for socialism in the United States. Our pages are open to a wide range of views on the left, both socialist and non-socialist. Except for editorial statements appearing on the editorial page, opinions expressed in columns and in feature or news stories are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the editors. We welcome comments and opinion pieces from our readers.

LUCID

ALLOW ME TO CONGRATULATE YOU on your editorial "Back on track with neo-colonialism" (*ITT*, Oct. 31). In the opinion of this writer, for nearly 40 years a recognized authority on colonialism (resident in 11 colonies, competent in three "colonial" languages and the author of two reports to the UN on colonialism, 1952-53), a more lucid exposition of colonialism and neo-colonialism, with special reference to American politics, would be difficult to conceive. Above all, it was a masterly piece of condensation.

—D.L. Howard-Ady
Ojai, Calif.

AMEN

THE CRITICS OF *ITT*'S DECISION TO accept an ad from the tobacco industry have been too harsh and too pious. I doubt that an ad showing three ordinary, nonsmoking people and prattling about how the tobacco industry creates jobs will induce even one reader of *ITT* to take up the nasty habit. I doubt it altered anyone's opinion about the efficiency and morality of tobacco subsidies either. The readers of *In These Times*, as opposed to the consumers of mass media generally, are not so easily swayed.

But even assuming that this ad had a small negative impact on attitudes about

smoking, *ITT*'s critics must weigh that against the value of keeping a newspaper like *ITT* alive. Financing left organizations has never been easy or glamorous. It is a difficult, time-consuming, day-in and day-out project that never ends. *ITT*'s critics are entitled to be aghast, but if they care as much about *ITT* as they do about the minimal impact of the ad, I suggest they prove their sincerity by finding out how much revenue the ad raised and then pledge to raise that amount each year in exchange for editor Weinstein's promise not to run the hideous ad anymore.

—Kip Sullivan
Kenyon, Minn.

WERGILD?

AFTER NELLA TILLMAN'S LETTER called my attention to the new judges article (*ITT*, Nov. 7) I could not believe what I read. "Efforts to breed children with a set of *known* characteristics"! I don't care what Judge Posner says about not selling older children, I believe a creep like him to be capable not only of that but also of urging we resurrect the practice of *wergild*—that is, putting a blood-price on each person depending on their social class and allowing murderers to go free if they can pay *wergild* to the victim's kin. (*Wergilds* varied according to social class. A prince cost 1,500 shillings, an ordinary freeman 100, a slave nothing.)

And not if, but when, they start talking of such things, they will have come a long way toward the Nazis' ultimate goal: to resurrect Germanic heathendom and all its practices, combining it with the more pernicious effects of science (e.g., racial eugenics and modern armaments).

May the common God of all us Christians and Jews strengthen the Senate to vote down, and consistently vote down, such vermin as Posner, Landes *et al* who shouldn't be sitting on any bench, let alone our supreme one.

—Brian S. Meadows
Rochester, N.Y.

BRAIN-NUMBED

MICHAEL KIMMEL'S P.C. (POLITICALLY correct") Ratings of Third World musicians (*ITT*, Nov. 14) are a disheartening example of how a party line approach can turn a left newspaper into fishwrap even faster than the major dailies.

To support his contention that Steel Pulse have "softened their message" in an attempt to "edge toward mainstream respectability," Kimmel comes up with exactly one (1) lyric from their latest album: an anti-contraceptive, anti-abortion stance. This is enough to propel him into fantasies of Jesse Helms singing along with Steel Pulse "if only they weren't black," and related brain-numbing departures from reality.

Kimmel tells us that Steel Pulse have sold out while Black Uhuru have remained true to their beliefs, but the same lyrics suggest to me the exact opposite, which I will continue to suspect until some writer dissuades me with more homework than Kimmel has bothered to do. Black Uhuru, having done time in New York, know that omitting all mention of their Rastafarian abhorrence of abortion is the way to avoid alienating their American audience, which they know perfectly well includes throngs of Michael Kimmels and no Jesse Helmses. Steel Pulse, in contrast, take a genuine market risk in condemning abortion while continuing to condemn neo-imperialism, racial hatred and nuke technocracy, as they always have.

—Daniel Mathews
Portland, Ore.

NORMAN THOMAS

HARRY FLEISCHMAN'S SALUTE TO Norman Thomas on the 100th anniversary of his birth was timely and appropriate. Fleischman, a long-time Thomas associate, friend and fan, was able to bring out his positive contributions. But Fleischman touched only briefly on the failures of Thomas as a party leader, treating this issue as a minor part of the reason there is no viable Socialist Party today. If we are ever to build a popularly-based socialist movement in this country we must learn from the past and critically evaluate the performance even of heroes like Debs and Thomas.

I have known several old time SP members from both the Debs and Thomas eras. They held SP locals together in Midwestern communities like Toledo, where a viable SP local existed until 1938. They faced the "red scare" and continuing harassment and discrimination from local authorities and held firm to their democratic socialist convictions in the face of competition from the Communist Party, the Trotskyists and other groups to the "left" of the SP during the '30s. One man in particular stands out. He joined the Young Peoples Socialist League in 1909, became an organizer for the IWW, later state secretary of the Ohio Socialist Party in the '20s and early '30s, ran for Congress on the SP ticket in 1934 (the last time there was an SP congressional candidate in Toledo) and finished his career as an organizer for a CIO union. With many other long-time party activists, he left the SP in the mid-'30s.

The SP's move to the left at that time was accompanied by limitations on the autonomy of local and state organiza-

tions—and led to demoralization of many local members. At the same time, the SP's adoption of a "revolutionary program" at its 1934 convention with Thomas' support further undermined many local party organizations. At the 1934 SP convention, delegates from Midwestern locals opposed the "revolutionary program" because of the problems it would cause locals in their communities.

The erosion of local party strength after 1934 contributed to the SP's poor showing in the 1936 Roosevelt landslide and made it more vulnerable and receptive to manipulation by groups like the Trotskyists whose amalgamation into the SP during 1936-38 would lead to a disastrous split. The Toledo local, for instance, died in 1938 after more than 30 years existence.

Could the political mistakes that Thomas and others made in the mid-'30s have been avoided? Possibly, a realistic SP program of critical support for the New Deal while maintaining an independent existence and building strong Party locals could have helped to maintain the SP base in the labor movement and other organizations of the time. Electoral actions at the local level, such as in Milwaukee where a strong local continued to be a force long after the national party became irrelevant, show what might have been accomplished.

It became very easy to imagine Norman Thomas without a Socialist Party. It would never be easy, however, to imagine a Gene Debs without a Socialist Party. That is the basic difference between these two socialist heroes.

—Dan Thomas
Toledo

SMOKER

APPARENTLY MANY *ITT* READERS are, like Walter Mondale, ashamed publicly to affirm their enjoyment of tobacco. To redress the balance, let me state that in my moments of leisure I enjoy French cigarettes, Turkish pipe tobacco and American rum-soaked cigars. (I also jog, use a negative ionizer and vegetables.) Having stated my personal bias, I will proceed to the two substantive issues raised by the controversy over the recent tobacco ad in *ITT* health and ethics.

Most scientific opinions assert that tobacco impairs health. But there are significant dissenting views which deny that the available evidence proves all the claims that have been made. The smoking-causes-cancer thesis does not explain all the data. For instance, lung cancer in men and in women increased at the same rate during every decade from 1890 to 1970, even though smoking increased more rapidly among men from 1890 to 1920 and among women from 1920 to 1940. Part of the problem is methodological: correlation does not prove cause and effect; it merely indicates promising areas for research. The negative correlation between smoking and Parkinson's disease, for example, does not prove that smoking prevents that disease. (For further discussion—with scholarly references—see *The Causes and Effects of Smoking* by H.J. Eysenck *et al.*, SAGE, 1980.)

Ethically, there is a difference between smoking and threats to health like toxic waste. An individual can personally evaluate the risks of the former, but may not even be aware of exposure to the latter. What are the limits to society's right to control human behavior?

I am enclosing a \$5 contribution to *ITT*, in addition to my three-year renewal. Will all anti-smoking-ad readers do the same?

—Norton Wheeler
Sioux City, Iowa

The photo credit for last week's cover on South Africa failed to appear. Both photos should have been credited: Voyisile Mbalo/AFRAPIX.

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PERSPECTIVES

By Eric Foner

IN MID-OCTOBER, SOME 60 scholars gathered at the DeKalb campus of Northern Illinois University to assess the current state and future prospects of American labor history. The conference revealed a discipline in transition and underscored the complex relationship between past and present, history and politics.

Although participants ranged in age from their late 20s to early 70s, the majority belonged to the '60s generation. Their interest in labor history grew out of political commitments—civil rights, feminism and opposition to the Vietnam war—forged in the student movement. They came to history convinced it could explain the evolution of a society seemingly in the throes of dissolution, and prepare the intellectual groundwork for a new wave of American radicalism.

Now entering middle age and academic security, these scholars have played a leading role in the redefinition of historical studies during the past 15 years. From a consensus-oriented exploration of the beliefs and actions of "great white men," American history was expanded to encompass the everyday experience of blacks, women and other once-excluded groups.

Labor history reflected these trends, as an older concern with labor organizations was superseded by the study of the culture and traditions of working-class men and women. The home, neighborhood, church and tavern joined the workplace among the subjects of labor history.

For this generation of scholars, the single greatest inspiration remains E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, published 20 years ago. The "new labor historians" found in Thompson's classic study not so much a brilliant application of Marxist theory to

tion. The impulse of the '60s had not yet spent itself, and the rewriting of labor history had only begun.

At an impasse.

Since 1973 that millennial spirit has given way to a pervasive sense that both politics and labor history have reached an impasse. This malaise stems in part from the prolonged job crisis within the universities, in part from dissatisfaction with the fruits of the new labor history and in part from the current crisis of the labor movement and the apparent conservatism of so many workers. (It is instructive that the phrase "workers' control," a rallying cry among younger workers in the early '70s and a preoccupation of many labor historians since, was never uttered at the conference.)

Although it has greatly expanded our understanding of working-class life, the "culturalist" approach now appears inadequate as either a definition of class or a substitute for it. Producing a patchwork of local studies illuminating the diverse values and identities among working people, it has failed to provide a coherent overview of labor's historical development. Nor does a return to a purely economic understanding of class, or to such time-honored paradigms as base and superstructure or "false consciousness" seem likely to explain either the history or behavior of today's working class.

Called in the hope of creating a new synthesis from the work of the past 15 years, the conference quickly turned instead to discussion of a new agenda for labor history. Various proposals emerged for redefining the assumptions and purposes of the field, but each raised as many questions as it answered.

It was repeatedly pointed out, for example, that too often "labor" is defined in terms of the white, male industrial worker. Never historically accurate, such an assumption is particularly untenable today when so many women have entered the paid labor force, clerical and service workers far outnumber those in production, and female and black workers often appear more receptive to unionism than white men.

While it is easy to agree on the need to integrate the experience of blacks, women and other groups into labor history, the problem of doing so remains almost intractably complex. Labor historians generally treat gender and race as secondary to class, while women's and black historians, fully aware of class, often fall back on explanations of historical events in terms of patriarchy and racism—concepts commonly treated as ahistorical abstractions rather than aspects of the social order possessing a history and class content of their own. It remains unclear how to reformulate labor history without simply incorporating race and gender into pre-existing paradigms, abandoning class as a category of analysis, or creating an endless jigsaw puzzle of separate experiences lacking a coherent overview.

One way of forging such a broad overview is to define labor history as the history of class relations in an evolving capitalist social order. Many participants agreed that, especially in a country where so many past social movements and ideologies have linked individuals across class lines, no account of the working class can be complete without examining its relationship to the middle class, farmers and capital.

Others insisted upon the need to move beyond labor history to the history of labor systems, or political economy (Marx's original project). Yet it was by no means

Labor historians seek useful past

certain how these new/old agendas might be pursued without succumbing to the danger of economic reductionism, or abandoning the working class as the focus of study. Were these calls not merely, as some feared, a repudiation of the cultural concerns of the past 15 years, but the death-knell of labor history as a discipline with its own unique identity?

Finally, a fundamental and troubling question loomed like a specter over the entire conference: what are the political purposes of labor history at a time when labor's forward march has been halted and the labor movement no longer appears to stand at the cutting edge of social change?

More than most academic fields, labor history has always attracted the politically committed, and labor historians—including non-Marxists—have always been influenced by a vision of history as a progress in which the working class enjoys a special role as the agent of change. Yet from the vantage point of 1984, modern labor history appears less a march toward some predetermined goal than a retreat

from an earlier political radicalism and workplace militancy. (This is not, of course, unique to the U.S. Indeed, if participants agreed on one thing it was the inadequacy of the traditional question "why is there no socialism in America?" at a time when European socialism stands in disarray.)

The past generation of labor historians have moved from the history of organized labor to the history of the working class. That project remains far from complete, but the DeKalb conference suggests that the field confronts another transition. From the history of the working class to what—the history of class relations, of capitalism itself? No one seemed quite certain, but it was widely agreed that a new approach is necessary. If the process of redefinition threatens to mark the end of labor history as conventionally understood, it also opens the prospect of a broad new vision of American history, with the experience of working people at its center.

Eric Foner teaches American history at Columbia University.

The "culturalist" approach of the '70s now appears inadequate as a definition of class or as a substitute for it, Foner says.

the problem of working-class formation (which it was), but a call to expand our notions of class to include customs, values and political traditions. Under Thompson's influence, class was redefined as an ongoing historical process, the emergence and consolidation of a "structure of feeling" that set workers apart from other social groups.

Along with its near relations—women's history, black history and the new social history—recent labor history has tremendously enriched our understanding of the American experience in general and workers' lives in particular. Yet the mood of the conference was anything but self-congratulatory.

Eleven years ago, a similar gathering at Rutgers University convened at a time of political optimism and scholarly expecta-

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carlos, the dawn is no longer beyond our reach

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PERSPECTIVES

Too much wasted effort is going into inter-union fights

unions has dropped by more than two million, or about 20 percent, in the last decade. The number of representation elections has declined by 70 percent since 1977 and in all of 1983 there were only 12 union election victories involving units of more than 200 people. As a result, there were only 80,000 workers in the entire country who were organized last year by all unions through National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) election procedures—down from annual totals of more than 275,000 in the early '70s. (According to Harvard University professor Richard Freeman, co-author of *What Do Unions Do?*, unions would have to organize an estimated 450,000 new members each year in private industry to avoid a further net loss in their private sector membership.)

going their greatest membership growth ever—quite unlike the situation now. Far from being healthy, inter-union feuding in today's anti-union climate merely aids employers and breeds confusion, suspicion and disgust among workers—many of whom quickly develop a "plague-on-both-your-houses" attitude.

Left-wing labor activists have a special responsibility to speak out against and oppose labor's internal wars. Many who work as union organizers have become actively involved in them as cannon fodder for one side or another. The left in the labor movement is not well served by this role or by the disturbing tendency among some radicals to develop a mindless institutional loyalty to whatever union bureaucracy happens to employ them. A far more constructive response would be to help generate membership pressure for cooperation between unions in organizing.

Some steps have already been taken in this direction. At the local, regional and national levels, they need to be greatly expanded. They include:

- **Grassroots organizing conferences.** More than 300 union rank-and-filers, local officers, organizing committee members and full-time staffers from 10 different unions met two years ago in Boston to exchange information about successful strategies and tactics, promote more membership involvement in organizing and overcome the secrecy and competitiveness that had surrounded past recruitment efforts in the area. Similar initiatives are necessary elsewhere to discourage institutional rivalry and isolate bureaucratic opponents of inter-union cooperation. In New Jersey, the Industrial Union Council is developing a plan for regular "organizing roundtables" at which staff organizers would meet and discuss common problems in order to provide a more "supportive context" for their work.

- **Coordinated organizing projects.** Despite problems associated with some of them, AFL-CIO-sponsored cooperative, multi-union organizing efforts like those in Los Angeles, Houston and Atlanta are useful models that should be duplicated in other cities. Pooling staff, sharing research data and resources and "clearing targets" have all significantly reduced organizing costs and minimized conflict among the participating unions.

- **Joint union campaigns.** Joint industry-wide organizing drives like the SEIU-UFCW Beverly Nursing Home (BEV-CARE) campaign are long overdue as a response to non-union employers operating on a nationwide basis in a number of industries, like manufacturing.

- **No-raid and jurisdictional agreements.** No-raid pacts between individual union rivals should be a major membership goal in those organizations. But, even more important, members of AFL-CIO affiliates should exert pressure on officers and staff in their respective unions to negotiate agreements "dividing up the turf" in organizing situations like the public sector in Ohio. This would avoid the enormous cost involved in representation elections based on competing union petitions filed for the same bargaining units.

Without more progress in all of the above areas, union back-biting, in-fight-



In recent years, jurisdictional fights have been common among public workers, most notably teachers. Now there is an upsurge in fights among rival unions in private industry.

By Steve Early

IN THE MANY VALID LEFT analyses of why the labor movement has failed to organize the unorganized in recent years, one factor has been largely overlooked: increasingly wasteful and destructive inter-union competition.

Every year, American unions spend millions of their members' dues dollars fighting each other, rather than non-union employers. It used to be that most of these conflicts occurred only in the public sector. But now an increasing number involve workers in private industry as well.

As *In These Times* itself has reported, Association of Federal, State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Communications Workers of America (CWA), Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the Teamsters, Laborers and other unions are often squaring off in states like Illinois and Ohio, which have recently enacted new public employee bargaining laws. Years of inter-union warfare between the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers have made them the Iran and Iraq of the American labor movement. The Teamsters and Machinists are conducting their own series of raids and counter-raids on each other across the country. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), AFSCME and CWA are currently locked in a costly, multi-state battle to affiliate the independent Telecommunications International Union (TIU). A contested Teamster bid for the ITU has drawn the AFL-CIO into a well-publicized legal and electoral tangle. And, meanwhile, in the Pittsburgh area, the Union of Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) and the United Steel Workers of

America (USWA) are engaged in a bitter feud over thousands of food store workers that has been highlighted by UFCW picketing of the Steelworkers' headquarters.

These contests and many others like them consume the time and energy of hundreds of full-time union staff members and a considerable portion of the limited organizing budgets. Often the organizing "targets" involved are not unorganized workers at all but established bargaining units where the workers are already represented by smaller independent labor organizations or a national union rival that is not party to a bi-lateral "no-raid" agreement or protected by the "no-raid" provisions of the AFL-CIO constitution.

No growth.

Any "growth" that individual unions experience as a result of this activity generally does not enlarge the labor movement as a whole or increase the percentage of

What these statistics indicate is that organized labor can ill afford to waste its limited resources on inter-union squabbling at a time when its membership is declining both in absolute numbers and as a percentage of an expanding U.S. workforce.

It is easy to understand, however, why so many individual unions continue to pursue a strategy of organizational growth based on competition with others in representation elections and affiliation campaigns. In the public sector particularly, the pickings are easier (because there is often little or no employer opposition to unionization) and there is the assurance of relatively large returns on any organizing investment. Each union is driven by its own dues imperative, not the needs or interests of working people as a whole. And there are many trade unionists who argue that the resulting competition is even "healthy," good for the workers involved (because it offers them "a choice"), and—given the history and

Every year American unions spend millions of dollars of their members' dues money fighting each other rather than non-union employers. These conflicts now occur over workers in both the public sector and in private industry.

the total workforce that is organized: it merely shifts unionized workers from the membership rolls of one organization to another.

In the private sector, where millions of workers of all types remain unorganized, successful large-scale recruitment of new members has just about stopped. According to the AFL-CIO figures, the private industry membership of all affiliated

structure of the American labor movement—probably inevitable.

They note, for example, that today's labor wars are pale in comparison to those which raged during the two decades of conflict between the AFL and CIO that began when the latter was formed in 1935 and ended only when the two merged in 1955. During this period, however, both craft and industrial unions were under-

ing, mud-slinging and money-wasting will continue to be a staple of too many so-called "organizing" campaigns. Labor's real adversary—the employers—will get off the hook. And both existing union members and unorganized workers will suffer as the casualties of labor's internal wars.

Steve Early is a union organizer too often involved in the labor wars.

The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times
By Christopher Lasch
Norton, 317 pp., \$16.95

By Eli Zaretsky

The question raised by Christopher Lasch's stirring and important new book, *The Minimal Self*, revolves around what it means to live a full life in advanced capitalist society. Lasch argues that one can live such a life only in relation to a "world of human associations and collective memories." What Lasch means is that only the knowledge of an objective, humanly shaped world that exists outside us can give meaning to personal existence. When this sense of an external world is threatened, as it is now, human beings begin to narrow their vision and see themselves as survivors. Selfhood be-

a logic to this series of events that we are inclined to deny.

Next Lasch points to our declining ability to form cooperative political movements as the only way to hold off catastrophe. The movements that he discusses—such as peace and ecology—tend to echo the shortsighted survivalism characteristic of the culture rather than to assert essential long-range goals. As we have less and less of a sense of being able to depend upon one another, he argues, we pay ever closer attention to "looking after number one."

Lasch's third level of discussion concerns the family. Here he argues that the modern extraction of personal life from intrusion and control by parents, the extended family, neighbors and local authorities, while doubtless liberating has also impoverished our intimate relations. "Now

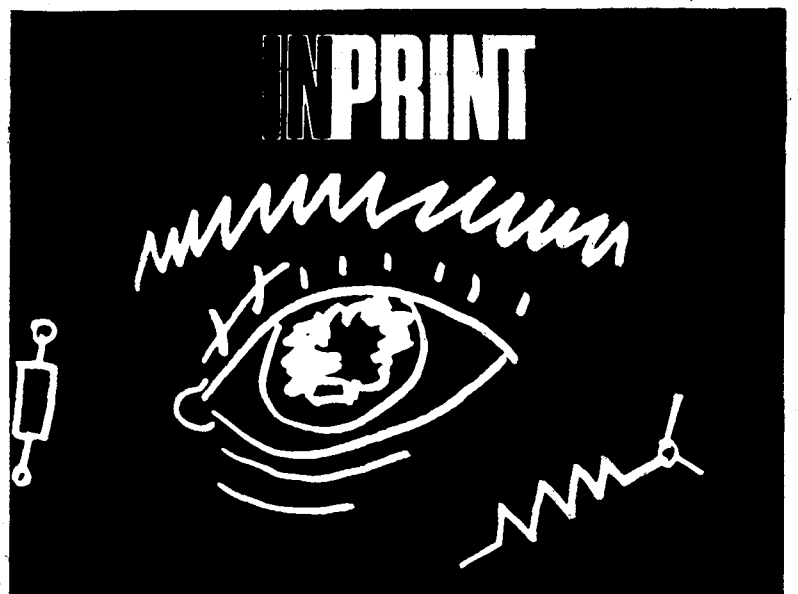
Evolution Quarterly and *The Whole Earth Catalogue's* preoccupation with self-sufficiency and escape into space to the endless survival and "success" manuals concerned with how to survive in the marketplace, in the corporation, even in marriage. The techniques of survival are always the same and echo studies of behavior in extreme situations (such as prisons). They have narrow, clearly defined objectives—don't dwell on the past or look too far into the future. The danger to the survivor mentality is feeling anything too deeply with its potential loss of control.

As Robert Heinlein's hero in *Stranger in a Strange Land*, cited by Lasch, wonders upon returning to Earth from Mars: "How can these human brothers suffer intense emotion without damage?" The point, Lasch writes, is that they can't. "Life is better on Mars because there is no emotion there and, above all, no sex."

Because the declining possibilities for common action have intensified the need for illusion, the predominant alternative to survivalism is a kind of apocalyptic elitism, as Lasch shows in his discussion of the popular movie, *My Dinner with Andre*. The film contrasts Andre, who has traveled the world in search of spiritual enlightenment, with Wally, who is grubbing for a living in New York City. Andre denounces a society of sleepwalkers: "We're living in the middle of a plague [caused] by what we're doing to the environment.... But is anybody calling it a plague? I mean in the time of the Black Plague, when the plague hit, people got the hell out."

The highpoint of Wally's existence, by contrast, is curling up with his electric blanket and his girlfriend. The profundity of Lasch's analysis lies in his showing that the apparently opposed mentalities of the hero and the anti-hero are essentially the same: self-deceiving, frightened and escapist.

The Minimal Self is an effort to develop and clarify the argument of *The Culture of Narcissism*, in which Lasch drew upon the concept of "narcissism" to explicate the personality structure and group psychology char-



acteristic of our society. *The Minimal Self* transcends Lasch's earlier book not only in its analytical depth but also in its greater wisdom and compassion. Yet there is a danger that it will be misunderstood, as that book was, as a pessimistic jeremiad similar to Andre's. Such a misunderstanding would result from the very denial and cynicism that Lasch is attempting to uncover.

Aristotle.

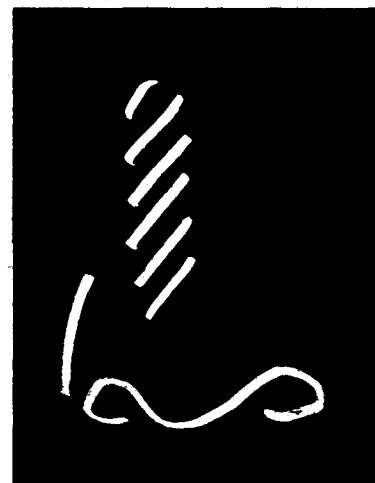
As in his earlier book, Lasch argues his case in a variety of ways ranging from discussions of art, mass consumption, psychologi-

cal and psychoanalytic debates to science fiction and more. At the heart of his analysis is the Aristotelian concept of practical reason (*phronesis*), a complicated concept that Aristotle used in arguing that there was a wisdom concerning moral ends deriving directly from practical labor as opposed to contemplation.

Similarly, Lasch suggests that science, which should reassure us by giving us a sense of objective reality, instead contributes to people's tendency toward wish-fulfillment, appealing directly to our fantasies that anything is possible. Here Lasch might have added that science, at least in its Baconian and experimental dimension, is based in practical crafts traditions such as metallurgy, dyeing and lens-making.

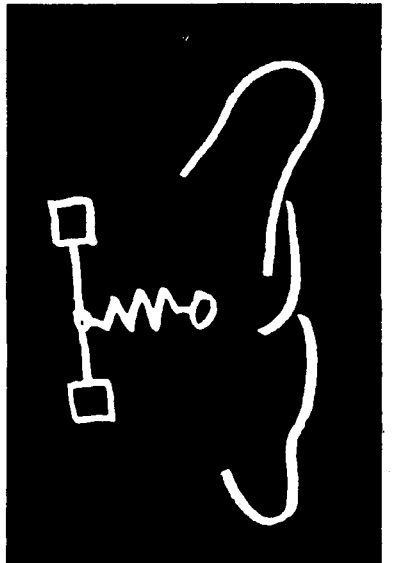
In a chilling chapter, examining some Holocaust literature, Lasch draws lessons concerning the ways in which a siege mentality, distrust of others and severance of emotional ties might facilitate survival. His argument is that only the capacity to imagine a moral order transcending the Holocaust "can give meaning to the terrible suffering this image is intended to commemorate." While it is difficult enough to face squarely how cataclysmic our situation today is, Lasch's real subject is personal and collective responsibility for this situation. In the modern age we have not addressed the situation collectively, at least in a large-scale and continuous way.

Lasch's analysis, rooted in a left tradition, defies conventional political distinctions. Instead, he addresses the mass psychology of insecurity, helplessness and denial that are so quickly sensed beneath such American facades as the conservative's smugness and narrow self-interest, the liberal's "realistic" and



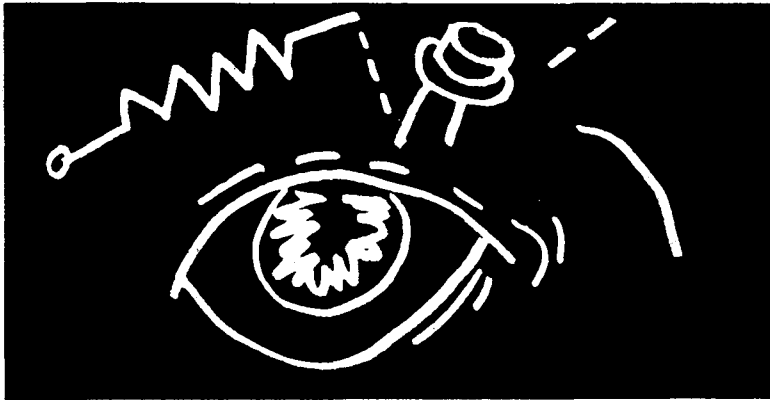
This concept enables Lasch to contrast the pre-industrial crafts tradition—Aristotle's model for *phronesis*—that aimed at extending human capacities and virtues rather than merely producing a particular product, to modern labor under conditions of capitalist production. Although sketchily developed, Lasch's approach has the potential of helping to correct the socialist tradition's mis-step, begun by Marx and Engels, in turning its back on the artisan tradition. This concept also enables Lasch to develop the traditional left emphasis on labor in ways that take into account both 20th-century social theory, with its emphasis on subjectivity and meaning, and contemporary feminism, with its critique of rationality.

On the basis of this revised conception of labor, Lasch dissects consumerism and mass consumption which, in contrast to those who criticize "materialism," points to the significance of the degradation of human creativity. In the past the material world reflected the strengths and abilities of the people who built it. By contrast, mass consumption encourages the "disposition to see the world as a mirror, more particularly as a projection of one's own fears and desires—not because it makes people grasping and self-assertive but because it



"balanced" assumption that we will continue to muddle through, and the angry demands of those on the left who see themselves as victims. In particular, Lasch's reflexivity—his effort to get the left to see itself in relation to the culture that spawned it—greatly advances the radical tradition in the direction of courage and maturity.

Eli Zaretsky is the author of *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life* and the editor of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* by William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki.



SOCIAL THEORY

Lasch chance for survival

comes "a kind of luxury"—the minimal self.

In a work of uneven quality but unfailing interest, Lasch makes a complex and convincing argument that cuts across disciplines and draws heavily on the theories of Marxism, psychoanalysis, phenomenology and feminism. He argues that the deepest psychological reason individuals require a world outside themselves is that without it the pain of existence—beginning with the complete helplessness and vulnerability of the infant and culminating in death—is unbearable. It is only the earliest relations with one's parents and others that make life psychologically, not just biologically, possible.

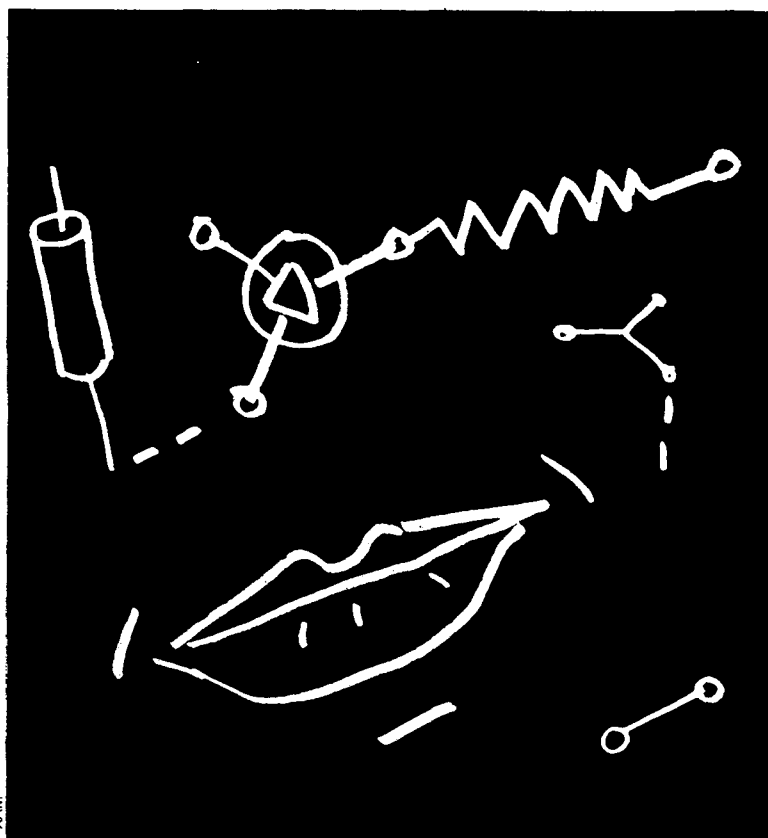
This "sense of primary connection," Lasch says, is reestablished for the adult in his or her relationship to society and culture. In particular, he stresses, drawing upon Marx, humans rely upon "the reassuring world of man-made objects" in which they see a mirror, not of their desires but of their accomplishments. The world outside the individual must seem durable and objectively real: without a sense that the external world will survive us, individual life has no meaning.

Lasch argues that in this century the sense of "a world that exists independently of [ourselves]" has become more and more difficult to maintain. He offers no single cause for this development but rather several interconnected ones. First, the constant closeness of our lives to unimaginable disaster that began with the World Wars, the Holocaust, and now is the threat of ecological doom and nuclear extinction. He suggests that there is

that the public or common world has receded into the shadows, we can see more clearly than before the extent of our need for it."

Survivor-mentality.

Lasch's evidence for the prevalence of the survivor-mentality ranges from Doris Lessing's science fiction novels that, in her words, attempt to look "from outside at this planet...as if at a totally crazed species," to Co-



Lasch argues that without a sense of an external world that will survive us, individual life today has no meaning.

ART & ENTERTAINMENT

FOLK MUSIC

Folkies mine topical veins

By Michael S. Kimmel

If the politics of the democratic left suffered a crushing setback in the most recent elections, it only means that we've got our work cut out for ourselves. And we're going to need plenty of inspiration as we defend the few fragile gains we have left and press to further enlarge social reforms. Happily, the left has never lacked for cultural inspiration, as some recent record albums indicate. After all, as Mick Jagger once asked, "What can a poor boy do/ 'cept to sing for a rock and roll band?"

Current topical songsters mine subjects as predictable as they are urgent. And most of their songs are lyrically memorable—poetic constructions that are, by turns, biting, ironic, wrenching and haunting, or propelled by moral rage. But most also rely on the simplistic musical formulae of what Tom Lehrer called "the folk song army," an instantly singable (but soon forgettable) three-chord progression, which is really nothing more than a vehicle to carry the lyrical message.

Form is decidedly subordinated to content, which may have worked for "This Land Is Your Land" but, in the '80s, can neither generate media exposure nor sustain even the most committed listener over an entire album side.

But politically conscious music doesn't have to be interminably boring. Recall Lehrer's own clever ditty: "Remember the war against Franco—that's the kind where each of us belongs;/ Though he may have won all the battles, we had all the good songs."

Listen, for example, to *Nuclear Power, No Thanks!!!*, an English compilation produced by Inter-Action Trust, an anti-nuke organization. Produced by Martin Carthy, a central figure on the British folk scene, the record presents some well-known folkies—Frankie Armstrong, John Kirkpatrick and Carthy himself—and some less famous performers singing about what's most important to them.

Songs range from bitter, pointed jabs at the scions of science and government who are trying to pass nuclear power off as unconditionally beneficial ("Ex-



Cris Williamson

perts"), to frightened complaints about our children's future ("Sleep Well"), to eloquent explorations of underlying political premises ("Who Reaps the Profits? Who Pays the Price?").

Like all compilations albums, *Nuclear Power* is uneven, with a few songs as musically uninteresting as they are lyrically formulaic. But there is enough good material here—and nearly all of it by a clever and sardonic singer/songwriter named Leon Rosselson—to easily justify repeated listening. (Order from Inter-Action, 15 Wilkin St., London NW5 3NG England.)

Rosselson is also featured on a domestically produced compilation called *Songs for Peace* (Rounder Records), on which he

banjo tune "Portland Town." While internationalist in its intention, bringing together musicians from a number of Anglo countries, *Songs for Peace* contains no solo performances by women (two appear as a part of a couple), who have been in the forefront of both the political as well as the cultural peace movements on both sides of the Atlantic. This is more than an unfortunate oversight; it reveals a political myopia that casts the contemporary movement as the residue of the New Left.

Fortunately, another compilation—*Out of the Darkness*—retains the moral outrage of earlier political struggles while incorporating the lessons of the '70s and '80s. KPFA radio (in Berkeley) DJ Robbie Osman and Linn Shapiro have compiled a surprisingly varied collection of songs by superb performers. Not only is this the finest recent politically aware record, it's one of the best independently produced records I've heard this year.

Pete Seeger covers journalist Vern Partlow's sarcastic 1945 anti-atom ditty reminding us that we all "could be cremated equal." A live version of Holly Near's "No More Genocide" is strong and angry, Cris Williamson's cover of anti-nuke anthem "Power" is upbeat and melodic (with superb lead guitar and synthesizer work by Tret Fure and Novi Novoq respectively), and Jesse Colin Young offers "Chain Reaction," a lean and startlingly tough rocker.

Slower ballads, such as Kate Wolf's "Sun Is Burning" or Dick Gaughan's "As I Walked on the Road" are also effective. But the strongest songs come from Charlie King, whose "Acceptable Risks" taps his masterful storytelling style by capturing an entire historical moment in a simple vignette, Don Lange, whose slow warning, "Take the Children and Run," burns itself into memory, and Sweet Honey in the Rock, who close the album with a gospel version of "Down by the Riverside" that breathes an enormous emotional power into that tired traditional hymn.

Out of the Darkness's usually strong content is matched by the commendable distribution meth-

od adopted by Osman and Shapiro. They sell the record at cost to leftist political groups to sell as fundraisers, thus spreading the proceeds directly to those groups actively engaged in political work for peace and safe energy. Naturally, you can order it direct from the record company (\$8.98 from Fire on the Mountain, P.O. Box 3827, Berkeley, CA 94703).

This is, as ads often say this time of year, the perfect holiday gift. It can also provide a moment of hope and anger—and we're going to need a lot of each during the next four years. ■

Michael S. Kimmel writes regularly on music for *In These Times*.

"To forage around in, it's the Sixties all over again: the hard-thinking, the searching, the awakening."

—Kirkus Reviews

"This book is the best I have seen on the 1960s. It contains excellent analyses of the period from a variety of perspectives, as well as absolutely splendid evocations and memories. It is a model of historical excavation and analysis, of the creation of a living history." —Michael Rogin, University of California, Berkeley

Radical politics and rock, black power and militant feminism, Vietnam and the counterculture—the Sixties. Nowadays, some say it was an era that undermined American values, some say its ideas are passé. To the more than 50 writers in *The Sixties Without Apology*—active in the various movements or influenced by them—there is no doubt about the importance of that time. The book mixes analysis and memories to appraise the era in a tone unapologetically sympathetic but not blindly uncritical.

Contributors include: the editors • Ellen Willis • Martin Duberman • Alix Kates Shulman • Paul Buhle • Flo Kennedy • Joel Kovel • Sol Yurick • Herb Blau • Tuli Kupferberg

Edited by Sohnya Sayres, Anders Stephanson, Stanley Aronowitz, and Fredric Jameson

THE
60s
WITHOUT
APOLOGY

\$12.95 paper, \$35.00 cloth

University
of
Minnesota
Press

2037 University Avenue SE
Minneapolis MN 55414

These artists show that folk music need not be interminably boring.

contributes perhaps the best song on the record, "The World's Police," an angrily sarcastic song whose melodic declensions and mixed tempos are brilliantly reminiscent of the finest Brecht/Weill collaborations. While the record is valuable for this song alone, most of *Songs of Peace* falls fairly flat.

An updated version of "The Patriots' Game" seems trite, and a cover of Steve Goodman's haunting "Ballad of Penny Evans" sounds anachronistic, and Iain MacKintosh's banjo plucking mutes the power of Goodman's *a capella* version. Contributions by Pete Seeger and Tom Paxton are passable, if not the standouts we've come to expect.

A few of the lesser-knowns are pleasant surprises, such as Dave Lippman's rocking electric "Stick Into the Gear," Dick Gaughan's "Your Daughters and Your Sons" and Derroll Adams' traditional-sounding

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CHICAGO

December 15

A benefit dinner for Casa El Salvador Farabundo Marti. Featuring music by Contra Punto. Keynote speaker Victor Rubio, representative of the FMLN-FDR of El Salvador. Bethany United Church of Christ, 4250 N. Paulina, 6:00 p.m., (312) 276-7444.

December 16

Chicago DSA forum on "Left, Right, or Center? The Future of the Democratic Party." Speakers: David Axelrod, Campaign Manager of Paul Simon for U.S. Senate; Nancy Shier, Political Action Director for Illinois AFSCME. To be held at 6:30 p.m. at Ascension Lutheran Church, 1901 W. Cornelia (southeast of the corner of Addison and Damen). Childcare and refreshments will be provided. For more information, call 871-7700.

NEW YORK, N.Y.

December 14

Far From Poland, documentary film about Solidarity by Jill Godmilow; comment by Daniel Walkowitz (NYU) and the filmmaker. Sponsored by MARHO, the Middle Atlantic Radical Historians' Organization, at John Jay College, 445 West 59th St., 7:30 p.m.

S. Africa

Continued from page 6

the unity negotiations between several of the largest unions. They are expected to reach agreement within several months on the formation of a national federation of unions, which would bring together under one umbrella more than 300,000 workers.

According to Lewis, the federation would be "non-sectarian, but it would have a political bottom line—majority rule in South Africa. This way right-wing unions and those that didn't see their function as explicitly political would be excluded."

The student boycotts.

"The boycotts and closure of schools has led to the worst disruption in black education since 1976," writes the October 19 *Financial Mail* of South Africa. The extent of the boycotts is staggering. The Department of Education and Training estimates that about 250,000 students are boycotting classes, while student leaders say that the true figure is well over 300,000. The boycotts have primarily affected schools in the large black townships of the western and eastern Cape and those in the Johannesburg and Pretoria areas. In these areas, 50 to 90 percent of the students are refusing to go to school.

Primary and secondary school students are led by the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), a national organization formed in 1979 after the banning of the South African Students Movement in 1977. Early this year COSAS put forward a list of demands that formed the basis of student grievances. The demands include: the formation of democratically elected student representative councils (SRCs) to replace prefects, who are student representatives selected by school authorities; stricter observance of corporal punishment regulations; an end to the sexual harassment of female students; an end to the practice of having SADF soldiers

teach in black schools, which students claim is done for indoctrination purposes.

Students are also demanding an end to age-limit laws, which dictate that students should have passed the equivalent of 10th grade by age 18 and that they must graduate high school by age 20. The laws deprive poorer students of an education and are aimed at expelling older, more radical students.

The students have been remarkably successful in forcing the authorities to address their grievances. In October Minister of Education, Cooperation and Development Gerrit Viljoen agreed to the introduction of SRCs and to allow age-limit laws to go unenforced. SADF teachers have been removed from almost all schools in the Transvaal (Johannesburg-Pretoria) area, although some remain in rural schools. But students insist that the concessions are not enough. Viljoen's SRCs must abide by a constitution drawn up by the minister, and the age limit has not been scrapped entirely. It can still be invoked at the minister's discretion.

The demands put forward by COSAS are a strike against the entire system of bantu education, in which blacks and whites attend different schools. Black schools are notoriously overcrowded and lack qualified teachers. And the disparities between the black and white education system are enormous. The *Financial Mail* recently reported that between 1978 and 1983, despite a five-fold increase in black student enrollment, the number of students who passed high school dropped from 76.2 percent to 48.3 percent. Among white students last year, 90 percent passed their final high school exams.

Student unrest and boycotts instigated the Soweto uprisings of 1976, in which it is estimated that more than 1,000 people, mostly students, were killed by police action. The student movement has grown since that time and has attracted much wider support within the black community.

Beyers Naude, the Christian theologian who emerged in October after being banned for seven years, explained in his first public address since 1977, "Today there

is a greater solidarity between parents and children than there was in 1960 or 1976. In 1976 we heard that many parents were saying to their children, 'What are you trying to do? Why don't you obey the authorities?' You do hear some of those voices today, but they're muted, and they always add, 'Our children are trying to tell us something that many of us do not wish to hear.'"

But the students are paying for their prominence. Many unarmed students have been killed by police bullets. In early November COSAS leaders were detained without trial and the homes of three COSAS leaders were fire-bombed. And as a South African Council of Churches fieldworker lamented, the boycotts may deprive an entire generation of young blacks of any formal education.

Beyers Naude adds, "There is a growing conviction among the youth that the solution to our problems will have to come from the youth themselves. They feel that 'nobody is coming to help us, so we must help ourselves.' And a major difference between now and previous

IN THESE TIMES DECEMBER 12-18, 1984 15 years is the growing willingness among many youth to risk shooting, suffering and even dying—not because they want to be martyrs, but because this may be the inevitable price that they would have to pay for the liberation not only of themselves but of the people of South Africa."

Naude's prediction is already being borne out. According to Jeremy Cronin, who recently completed a prison sentence for ANC activities, the number of young people leaving the country to join *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (Spear of the Nation), the military wing of the ANC, is greater now than it has been at any time in the past.

This opposition will not be stifled easily. As the political networks become more closely linked—in what the UDF's Manuel describes as the "acid test" of the coming months—the fabric of resistance will become increasingly difficult to tear. Even the repressive machinery of the apartheid state may be unable to inflict the type of political damage it was once capable of.

David Goodman reports regularly from South Africa.

Comedy

Continued from page 16

"My real love is drama," says Toles-Bey, who is currently performing in *Po* at the Parkway Theatre on the city's South Side. "After my fall, I got to appreciating a lot of things. It gave me the grit I needed." Toles-Bey has acted in *No Place to Be Somebody* and *Top That Brownsville Raid*, to name just two.

Chatman's first play was with the Better Boys Foundation at the Le Mont Zeno Theatre when he was an adolescent. He did three years of volunteer theater there.

Chatman performed comedy in a similar vein to that of Straight-Up with his brother, better known as the Chatman Brothers. They played the local comedy circuit in the Chicago metropolitan area, such as the Comedy Cottage in Rosemont, where he and his brother were one of many acts. Says Chatman, "By the

time we came up, the audience was drunk and didn't care what we were saying."

Last year Toles-Bey and Chatman went south for the winter and started playing the streets of New Orleans. They were discovered by John Shoup, the successful owner of LuLu White Mahogany Club in the French Quarter. According to Toles-Bey, who is never short on modesty, "He was totally overtaken by our act."

Shoup signed them up and they were soon working regularly. The club experience gave them some discipline and they worked their act into a 45-60 minute gig.

Now Toles-Bey and Chatman feel they are ready to get off the streets and focus on nightclubs. They love to do improvisation, which is better suited to a club than the streets. There are not many black clubs that can afford to pay them. "We need a place where we can work on new material," says Chatman. Adds Toles-Bey, "The white liberal clubs don't pay much either."

Cindy J. Kirshman is a freelance writer based in Chicago who writes frequently for the Lerner newspaper chain.

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PUBLICATIONS

JEWISH CURRENTS, DECEMBER—Editorial, "Reagan's Lonely Land-slide," "Jews & Jewish Identity in the Soviet Union," A Statement, Paul Robeson Jr. & A.B. Magil, "Readers' Forum on Soviet Jews," H. Leivick, "Three Hanuka Candles." Single copies postpaid, \$1.50. Subscription \$12 USA. Jewish Currents, Dept. T, 22 E. 17th St., NYC 10003.

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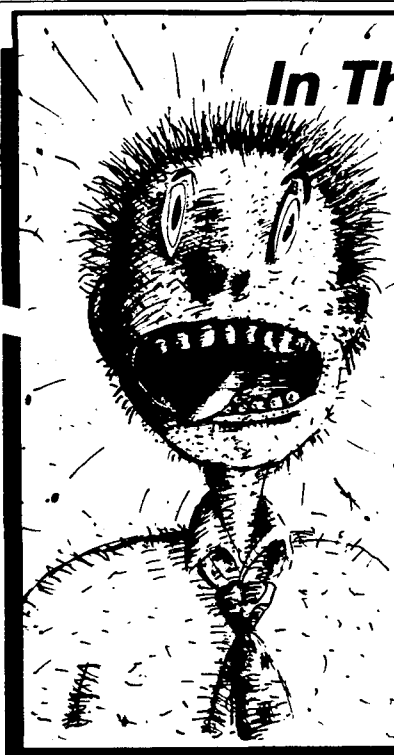
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By Cindy J. Kirshman

IT IS SATURDAY NIGHT ON CHICAGO's heavily traveled Rush Street. A small crowd has gathered near the Kentucky Fried Chicken. At the center are two young black men dressed in vests, bowler hats and heeled shoes. At first glance they look like a couple of street-wise city dudes. Out of curiosity others begin to inch forward. Laughter and applause from the crowd reassures spectators that maybe the act is not a con.

The performers begin their act characterizing white and black moms taking their kids shopping. They do white families first:

"Mommie, mommie, I want a Cabbage-Patch doll," says the white child.

"Come on, darling, all the Mexicans have bought them up for birth certificates," says the mother.

Next they do the black families:

"Mommie, mommie, I want a Cabbage-Patch doll," says the black child.

The mother drags the child by the ear and yells, "You know we ain't got no damn money."

The reactions from the crowd are mixed. Two white teenagers, apparently unable to stand for blacks characterizing whites, appear to be insulted and leave in a huff. Most everyone else seems to be loving it—black and white alike, men dressed in business suits along with college kids in blue jeans.

This is the comedy team of "Straight-Up" and the two comedians, John Toles-Bey and Byron Chatman, are being just that—"straight-up" with their audience—telling people, through a visual medium, how life really is.

"Most of what we do is political satire," says the 29-year-old Toles-Bey. "The reason for that is simple," adds Chatman. "I was born black. This stuff comes off the top of my head. It's what I see every day. Nothing philosophical about it. If there's a message, it's because we try to be close to the truth. And if it's funny, people will listen. We've got to entertain."

Involved in theater and comedy for the past decade, Toles-Bey and Chatman literally took their act to the streets about two years ago looking for greater exposure and to earn decent money. Their nightclub became Madison and State Streets in the Loop and Rush Street. Audience response to them has been enthusiastic, particularly from the black community.

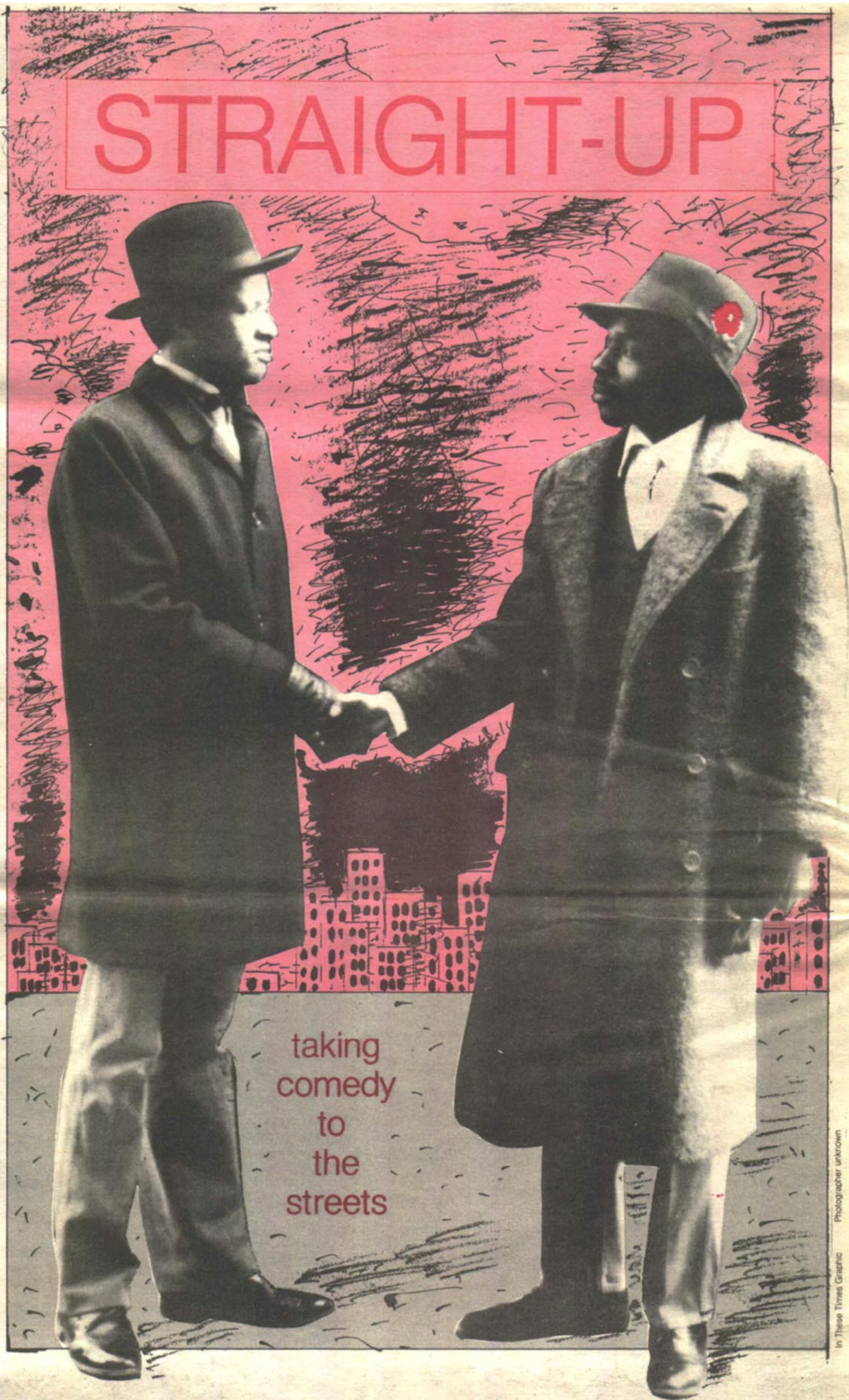
"People who don't know us come up to me and say, 'You uplifted our day,'" Toles-Bey explains. One man with a multitude of family problems came up to them and gave \$50. Another guy took pictures of them and kept dropping them in their bucket. "We didn't know where they came from," claims Toles-Bey. "One day he came up to us and introduced himself as Pete Thomas. The man now does our business cards."

Other peoples' reactions are much more cautious. "It's not so much our being black that people are afraid of but the images we project. We have our vests and our big hats and people aren't sure what we are up to."

"What we are trying to do," adds Chatman, "is break down some stereotypes. And we are doing it through Vaudeville, with a 1984 style."

Toles-Bey and Chatman do a variety of characters in their act: Roger, the roving reporter, Dr. Rev. Sweet Touch and Leroy Wong, the first Afro-American Chinese. With the latter character, Chatman plays Leroy who goes into a black bar asking for a rum and coke. Toles-Bey is the bartender who calls him "boy." Leroy acts insulted and shouts, "You don't call me no boy."

When the bartender serves him the rum and coke, Leroy says he wanted a separate glass of rum and a separate glass of coke. Out of exasperation, the bartender says, "You think my job is easy. Let's change roles." So Toles-Bey becomes Leroy and Chatman is the bartender. Toles-Bey, as Leroy, asks for a rum and coke and Chatman replies, "We don't serve no niggers here."



Toles-Bey and Chatman describe their style as "visual." It's a style perfected for the streets: rehearsed vignettes that keep the crowds moving. They are masters of crowd control. Toles-Bey likens their act to basketball. "We do it every day. We are sharp because there's hardly a day when we don't practice our craft."

Always eager to express enthusiasm for his work, Toles-Bey proclaims to be a self-taught person with little schooling. "My quest in life is to be my own man," he exclaims. "If I have a life philosophy it would be something to do with being confident."

Both he and Chatman view street performing as their main work. "It is simply what we do," says Chatman. On some days the money is fantastic, but at other times very little is earned.

Chatman admits that working the streets is an adventure. "Playing Rush

Street, some of the young white guys mess with our act. Once, some wino laid down in the middle of our set. John had to carry him away and the audience thought it was part of the show. We get a lot of cranks. The street sharpens you up."

These days, there is a lot more competition on the streets. "When we first started there was this bearded saxophonist, some old European lady behind the Cultural Center and us," says Toles-Bey. Now, with the more liberal city ordinance allowing street performers on the streets until 10:00 p.m., things sometimes get out of control. "There are these eight- and 10-year-old break-dancers and nobody's monitoring them."

Both Toles-Bey and Chatman have paid their dues, working a variety of black theaters and nightclubs during the past 10 years. There are just a few regular training grounds for black performers, such as

the Kuumba Theatre and the Black Ensemble. Places such as Second City do not seem to hire blacks, Chatman claims. Theaters on Chicago's North Side hire a few black artists, but then the black community does not follow.

Toles-Bey and Chatman came together out of a common need—to get the exposure beyond the parameters of the black community. The two met while competing for the same part in a play. Both have similar backgrounds, growing up in some of the city's rougher neighborhoods, falling in love with theater and performing through local black theaters.

Toles-Bey started working at Kuumba Theatre at age 21 where he received much help from the founder, Val Gray Ward. After Toles-Bey had gotten into trouble with the law, Ward gave him her support and the opportunity to learn his craft.

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